

GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES  
ON CONTEMPORARY / SMOOTH JAZZ

By

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GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES  
ON CONTEMPORARY / SMOOTH JAZZ

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I am grateful for the financial support that I received over the course of completing this dissertation and degree. I feel privileged to have been able to work for the Department of Geography, where I taught for four years as a graduate teaching assistant, including courses on Spatial Analysis and the Geography of Music. The department, Dr. Tom Wikle, and Dr. Stephen Tweedie all helped fund travel for research, conference presentations, and study abroad. I would also like to thank the OSU Foundation for sponsoring me as an OSU Graduate Fellow. It feels great to have this dissertation behind me so I can tell all of these generous people, "I finally did it – Thank you!"

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As this dissertation is centered on contemporary / smooth jazz, I would like to thank all of the talented artists and groups who have composed, recorded, and performed this music over the years. I was born and raised in Orange County, California, and even though I am a classical guitarist, I always enjoyed listening to the music on KTWV 94.7 FM “The Wave”. It was the jazz guitar on this station that caught my ear, and this music became the soundtrack to my morning commutes to college, studying, and weekend trips to the beach. My first smooth jazz CD was Peter White’s *Caravan of Dreams*, and I feel lucky to now be able to call him a friend. Back in the late 1990s, I wrote Peter a letter about how much his music meant to me, I later got to meet him backstage at a concert in Cerritos, and he even came to my own classical guitar recitals at Cal State Fullerton.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the love and support of all of my family. My parents made a lot of sacrifices during my childhood, both in terms of time and money, so that I was able to have the opportunity to study with some really great guitarists. I probably would not have had the interest or ability to approach a topic at this level academically in music if it were not for that training. My late grandfather, Robert Flynn, whom I became very close with during my graduate studies, was always supportive of my education, and I appreciated his encouragement from 1,400 miles away during our weekly Sunday night phone calls.

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Seven years later, I am so grateful that we found each other. Rachel’s never-ending love, support, and encouragement has kept me going with this degree, even when I had thoughts about throwing in the towel. I appreciate how she has been so accommodating over the years with my education and career. I cannot thank her

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Thanks again to all!

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**Title of Study:** GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY / SMOOTH JAZZ

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**Abstract:**

This dissertation examines the geography pertaining to the radio format and subgenre of contemporary / smooth jazz from three different perspectives. First, the geography of audience consumption is investigated by studying the regional popularity of smooth jazz broadcasting on FM radio since the late 1980s, along with where jazz artists and groups have toured over the past fifteen years, with consideration given to both market locations and popular types of concert venues. Second, the musical landscapes of smooth jazz, a largely instrumental music, are investigated by examining how specific and generalized places suggested programmatically in song titles are portrayed through musical elements extending beyond text, such as melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, instrumentation, texture, etc. Finally, by looking at the imagery found in smooth jazz album covers, music videos, and other promotional material, the visual sense of place will be constructed for this music, along with the image, status, and lifestyle that are associated and packaged with smooth jazz. This research will offer academic attention to a style of music that has been largely neglected by scholars despite its undeniable commercial success. This dissertation will also add to the literature in the growing sub-field of music geography, showcasing approaches by which other genres of music can be studied geographically beyond the too-often used method of analyzing song texts.

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## PREFACE

*Born and raised in Southern California, I grew up listening to 94.7 FM “The Wave,” a Los Angeles radio station that broadcast in the “smooth jazz” format from 1987 until 2012. Considered to be the pioneer of this radio format, The Wave introduced me to the music of Peter White, David Benoit, Acoustic Alchemy, The Rippingtons, Hiroshima, and many other great artists. I have been privileged over the years to have heard these musicians perform live in concert at the Hyatt Regency Newport Beach, Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts, Catalina Island JazzTrax Festival, and in recent years near my current home in Texas at Austin’s One World Theatre. As a geographer with a background in classical guitar performance, my passion for music and curiosity regarding place naturally intersects at the subfield of music geography, and ultimately drove me to consider pursuing a dissertation exploring the relationship of geography and smooth jazz.*

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1987, guitarist Peter White, who was at the time best known for the twenty years that he had spent accompanying singer Al Stewart, was living in Los Angeles and came across Los Angeles radio station 94.7 FM “The Wave.” What caught White’s ear was the mixture of styles, including jazz, world music, nouveau flamenco, hip-hop, and new age music.<sup>1</sup> This coalescing radio format of instrumental music that would

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<sup>1</sup> Smooth Jazz Now. 2002.

[http://www.smoothjazznow.com/interviews/peter\\_white\\_2002.htm](http://www.smoothjazznow.com/interviews/peter_white_2002.htm). Web. (last accessed 15 Oct 2014).

eventually evolve into contemporary “smooth” jazz inspired White to pursue a very successful solo instrumental career, which is now entering its third decade.

According to the All Music Guide, “Smooth jazz is an outgrowth of fusion, one that emphasizes its polished side. Generally, smooth jazz relies on rhythms and grooves instead of improvisation. There are layers of synthesizers, lite-funk rhythms, lite-funk bass, elastic guitars, and either trumpets, alto, or soprano saxophones. The music isn’t cerebral, like hard bop, nor is it gritty and funky like soul-jazz or groove—it is unobtrusive, slick, and highly polished, where the overall sound matters more than the individual parts.”<sup>2</sup>

Inexplicably, despite the momentum taking place in academic research pertaining to popular music and cultural studies, smooth jazz has somehow remained absent from jazz historical narratives, and it has been neglected when it comes to scholarly writing.<sup>3</sup> In an effort to fill this void, as well as break some new ground in the subfield of music geography, smooth jazz has been chosen to serve as a case subject.

Instead of a traditional monograph dissertation, three articles consider a different perspective of place as it relates to smooth jazz. The first article seeks to examine places of consumption, through analyzing market penetration and listenership share data covering twenty-five years of smooth jazz radio broadcasting, as well as by investigating the spatial pattern of live performances given by smooth jazz musicians

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<sup>2</sup> All Music Guide. 2014. <<http://www.allmusic.com/subgenre/smooth-jazz-ma0000002860>>. Web. (last accessed 15 Oct 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Washburne, Christopher. 2004. “Does Kenny G Play Bad Jazz? A Case Study.” *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*. Eds. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno. New York: Routledge: 137.

throughout a fifteen-year period of touring. This article also reflects on place by exploring specific venues and identifying types of performance space that have served as successful hosts for promoting smooth jazz. The second article explores programmatic music found within smooth jazz, and analyzes how artists and groups can utilize a canvas of musical elements to portray their perceptions of places, and how listeners might “hear” places. After considering a musical sense of place that is heard, a third article approaches smooth jazz through a different sense—the visual—looking at how the accompanying imagery in album cover art often has much to say about the geographic setting, music tourism, and lifestyle associated with this music.

## **Chapter II Overview**

Smooth jazz officially began as an American radio format in the late 1980s, and became a mainstay on terrestrial radio throughout the United States for more than two decades. Smooth jazz has also maintained a significant and steady following from its audience in regard to live performances. This chapter seeks to understand the geography of smooth jazz listenership through two proxies of consumption. First, by compiling historical data from the broadcasting industry on radio station formats and listener shares, a spatiotemporal database was constructed to illustrate the penetration and success of smooth jazz over a 25-year period spanning from 1987 to 2012. Second, the locations and frequency of live performances could also be used to explore the regional geography of smooth jazz consumption. By querying the application program interface (API) for PollstarPro’s concert database, an inventory of nearly 20,000



performances given by smooth jazz musicians at 3,665 venues between 1999 and 2013 provided another glimpse of where this music is most popular. While much research in music geography has tended to be qualitative in nature, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how leveraging geographic information systems and quantitative analysis, including descriptive statistics and location quotients, can provide illuminating visualizations of the spatial occurrences of musical phenomena, such as smooth jazz's radio market penetration and the frequency of live performances. In addition to identifying hotspots of consumption based on smooth jazz radio station longevity and frequent performances, this discussion is also concerned with the geography of performance spaces and profiling the demographics and lifestyle characteristics of those who have tuned their dials and attended shows to hear this music.

#### Objectives of Chapter II:

- Employ GIS and quantitative analysis to delineate regions where smooth jazz has enjoyed its most success and identify areas where it never really caught on.
- Provide a profile of the demographics and lifestyle characteristics of the smooth jazz audience.
- Identify specific venues and a typology of performance spaces that have been successful sites for smooth jazz.

### **Chapter III Overview**

Lyrical analyses comprise a large proportion of the existing literature of music geography because text is arguably the most accessible element of music. Geographers have frequently stripped lyrics away from the music, and have missed out on exploring a variety of musical parameters that can evoke place. Given that smooth jazz is largely an instrumental musical style, this genre provides an excellent case study to showcase how various musical elements, including, but not limited to, melody, rhythm, tempo, timbre, texture, and instrumentation, have been effectively used by musicians to capture an aural sense of place. This chapter seeks to demonstrate how smooth jazz musicians have been inspired by specific and general types of places and have gone about commemorating and abstracting them through musical treatments. Along the way, this discussion will touch upon what this music reveals about the demographics and lifestyle of its audience, the straddling of the fine line between cultural appreciation and appropriation, and the reciprocity of how place and smooth jazz have shaped each other.

#### **Objectives of Chapter III:**

- Identify which places have provided the most inspiration for musical depiction in smooth jazz.
- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences in musical treatments depicting the same landscape that has been read, interpreted, and abstracted into sound by multiple musicians.

- Recognize what smooth jazz reveals about the demographics and lifestyle of its audience.
- Demonstrate how giving attention to an assortment of musical parameters through careful listening can result in a more complete understanding of how ideas are expressed musically.

#### **Chapter IV Overview**

After giving consideration to how smooth jazz musicians interpret inspiring landscapes and *aurally* express them in the form of music that is highly programmatic of place, this chapter complements that research by switching senses to look at how place is *visually* conveyed throughout the smooth jazz industry. This chapter deals with how place and lifestyle are represented, depicted, and marketed through graphic materials accompanying this music. Content analysis is performed on the artwork for nearly 1,600 smooth jazz album covers to identify the major geographic themes most closely associated with this music. Additional consideration is given to promotional materials and music videos, which lend support toward determining the image commoditized by smooth jazz. Collectively, these visual cues make statements about place preference, suggest that smooth jazz can help to virtually transport its listeners to exotic places and great escapes, and that, by joining others who enjoy hearing this music, one can enjoy the good life.

#### Objectives of Chapter IV:

- Identify the specific and general types of places that are most prominently featured in smooth jazz coverscapes and attempt to understand their significance to the performers and/or the music on the albums.
- Apart from location and scenery, delineate other iconography in visual media that serves to create a genre-wide visual profile of “smoothness” and identify stereotypes that graphically generalize smooth jazz.
- In addition to understanding the visual sense of place, examine the lifestyle that is portrayed in these examples of graphic media.
- Demonstrate the value in album cover artwork, promotional materials, and music videos as cultural artifacts that have been largely untapped in academic research to date.

#### Summary

This dissertation serves to add to the growing body of literature in the subfield of music geography by considering the commercially successful, yet academically overlooked musical style of smooth jazz, and approaching this music from various geographic perspectives. It will be demonstrated that smooth jazz, considered both in terms of the actual music as well as an industry, has much to reflect on physical geography, human geography, regional geography, urban geography, tourism geography, and even meteorology. While the geography of smooth jazz may be

interesting on its own merit, the goal of this research is to use this music as a case study to demonstrate how other musical styles could be approached.

Overall Dissertation Objectives:

- Understand the geographies of smooth jazz by investigating its regional popularity pertaining to listener consumption, recognizing preferred types of performance space, listening for how landscapes are expressed through sound, and exploring how place is visually packaged and marketed along with this musical genre.
- Show how GIS and quantitative techniques can be applied in conjunction with qualitative methods to study, map, visualize, and analyze musical phenomena, regardless of the genre.
- Demonstrate a variety of methods by which musical styles, especially those that are primarily instrumental, can be investigated geographically, such as through an assortment of musical parameters, and via ancillary media, such as album covers, promotional materials, and music videos.

## CHAPTER II

### ON THE AIR AND ON STAGE:

#### THE GEOGRAPHY OF SMOOTH JAZZ CONSUMPTION

##### **Abstract**

*Since the late 1980s, smooth jazz has been a commercially successful radio format and popular subgenre of jazz, yet it has received very little attention from scholars. In this paper, I explore the geography of smooth jazz listenership through studying market penetration and listenership shares covering twenty-five years of smooth jazz radio broadcasting and by examining nearly twenty thousand live performances made by smooth jazz artists over the past fifteen years. These data shed light on the regional popularity of smooth jazz, as well as reveal a demographic and lifestyle associated with those who enjoy this music.*

## Introduction

Saxophonist Jay Beckenstein, who has enjoyed a long, fruitful career as both a soloist and as a member of the contemporary jazz group Spyro Gyra, has stated on many occasions that “...smooth jazz isn’t a musical style-it is a radio format” (Beckenstein 2001, 16-17). Christopher Washburne (2004, 132) points out that “the label *smooth jazz* is a conspicuously fabricated construct that originated in consumer research studies conducted by Broadcast Architecture, a radio consulting firm. The company found that *smooth* was the most frequently used term listeners employed to describe this mainly instrumental musical style, whose defining elements include R&B, Latin, and soul-infused grooves, heavy use of synthesizers, easily recognizable melodies, slick pop-like studio productions, and jazz-like soloing.”

Despite its undeniable commercial success for several decades as both a radio format and a subgenre of jazz, scholars have paid little attention over the years to smooth jazz. In his essay “Does Kenny G Play Bad Jazz?” a dejected Christopher Washburne (2004, 143) states that “It is troubling to me that we, as music scholars, choose to write about our own favorite music, searching for those Schulleresque gems, while ignoring the mundane, the music that actually plays a role in the everyday lives of millions.” Aaron West, a former Ph.D. student in the music department at the University of North Texas, was inspired to answer Washburne’s call, and devoted his 2008 doctoral dissertation to examining “the contested origins, criticism, performance practice, and reception of smooth jazz.” There is still a treasure trove of material in smooth jazz awaiting exploration, especially from the standpoint of geography, such as

studying the regional popularity of this music and aiming to understand the demographic and lifestyle of those who enjoy it.

In order to study the geography of smooth jazz listenership, this paper explores two proxies of consumption—FM radio broadcasting and live performances. Given that the smooth jazz subgenre had its roots as a creation of terrestrial radio, it only seems logical to reconstruct a geographic history of the smooth jazz radio format, which is timely, as this chapter of smooth jazz has recently come to a close, with the dropping of the format in the last major strongholds of San Diego, Sacramento, New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia (Adler 2012). As a musical subgenre, smooth jazz continues to thrive, especially on stage. The geography of smooth jazz listenership can also be studied by examining where performers find their live audiences, and the types of venues that best fit this musical style.

This paper seeks to address the following research questions:

- In which regions has smooth jazz enjoyed the greatest popularity as a radio format and/or musical style? In which regions has it never caught on?
- What demographics and lifestyle traits characterize the smooth jazz audience?
- With the decline of terrestrial radio, how has smooth jazz continued to stay relevant and expand its geographic footprint?
- What are the characteristics of successful venues for smooth jazz performances?



## **On The Air: The Geography of the Smooth Jazz Radio Format**

As a musical style, elements of smooth jazz can be seen as early as the fusion music of the 1970s, through the work of Chuck Mangione, Bob James, Grover Washington, and other artists, so it is much easier to define the temporal birth of smooth jazz as a radio format. The consensus in the radio industry is that the “1987 launch of ‘the Wave,’ KTWV 94.7 FM, a radio station in Los Angeles that programmed New Age music, instrumental and vocal soft fusion” (Washburne 2004, 132) marked the introduction of a new radio format. KTWV signed on the air on February 14, 1987, replacing rock station KMET, and the radio format was born. As The Wave started to take off, the station became syndicated in other radio markets, including San Diego, Seattle, and Dallas (Duffy 1987).

For this study, data was collected from various sources in order to reconstruct the historical geography of smooth jazz radio broadcasting between Spring 1987 and Spring 2014. A database of Federal Communications Commission (FCC) data hosted by Cavell, Mertz & Associates, Inc. at <http://www.fccinfo.com> provided useful information on home markets and changes to call letters and frequencies over the years. David Gleason, who has worked for fifty-two years in radio broadcasting, hosts the Web site AmericanRadioHistory.com, which proved extremely valuable because it included .PDF scans of quarterly ratings directories from Radio & Records (R&R) and James Duncan’s quarterly periodical *American Radio*, which had details about which markets had smooth jazz radio stations, along with data on quarterly listenership. Information about

Arbitron (now Nielsen) radio markets was attained from Katz Media Group's Radio Resource Center at [www.krgspec.com](http://www.krgspec.com).

When working with radio data, it is important to understand some basic broadcasting industry terminology, and these definitions are provided by Nielsen:

**Cume Persons:**

The total number of *different* persons who tune to a radio station during the course of a day part for at least five minutes.

**Cume Rating:**

The Cume Persons audience expressed as a percentage of all persons estimated to be in the specified demographic group (Station Listeners ÷ Population).

**Share:**


The percentage of those listening to radio in the Metro who is listening to a particular radio station (Station Listeners ÷ All Radio Listeners).

**Time Spent Listening:**

An estimate of the amount of time the average listener spent with a station (or total radio) during a particular day part. This estimate, expressed in hours and minutes, is reported for the Metro only.

In Figure 2.1, radio listenership data is provided for San Diego, Arbitron's 17th largest radio market, as of Spring 2007. During that quarter, the FM station with the highest listener share was KIFM 98.1 FM, a long-time smooth jazz station, receiving 5.4% of all radio listening in the San Diego metropolitan area. It was not a fluke, as the station garnered a 5.6% share in Winter 2007, 5.5% in Fall 2006, 5.0% in Summer 2006, and 4.1% in Spring 2006. Age brackets are often provided in these ratings lists, and smooth jazz has always been enjoyed by an older audience. Here, KIFM ranked first among 35-64 year olds, fourth among 25-54 year olds, but only 28th within the 12- to 17-year-old age bracket. The cume persons statistic provided for Spring 2007 was 2806,

which is usually expressed in hundreds. Thus, approximately 280,600 different people in Greater San Diego listened to smooth jazz on KIFM for at least five minutes on any given day during the rating period. The time spent listening was expressed in this report on a per-week basis, and this station had very loyal listeners who tuned in for eight hours each week. In comparison, KMYI 94.1 FM, a Hot Adult Contemporary (Hot AC) station, reached nearly 50,000 more people (cume of 3294), but listeners of that station only tended to tune in for 5-1/2 hours per week.



**SAN DIEGO** 17

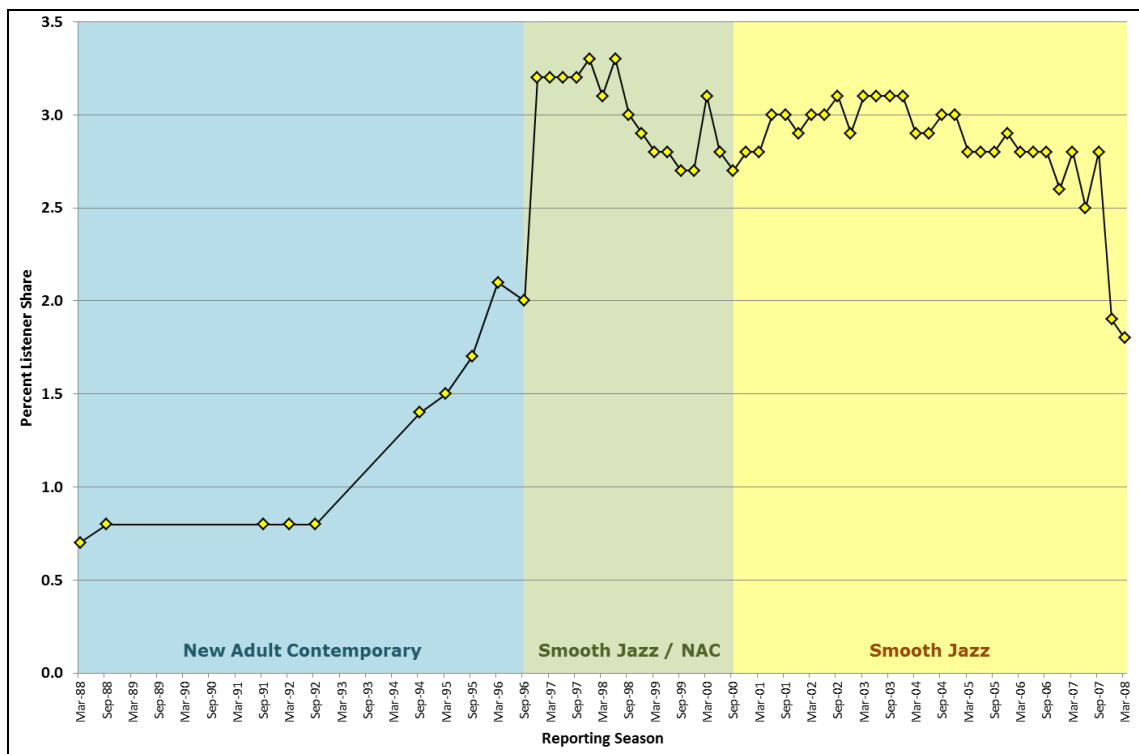
Population: 2,484,900 (Black: 5.6%; Hispanic: 27.1%)

| SPRING '06 | SUMMER '06 | FALL '06 | WINTER '07 | SPRING '07 | STATION   | FORMAT      | OWNER             | FREQ.     | POWER       | CUME PERSONS<br>(in hundreds) | 12-17 RANK | 18-34 RANK | 18-49 RANK | 25-54 RANK | 35-64 RANK | WEEKLY TIME SPENT<br>LISTENING | NATIONAL<br>REP FIRM |
|------------|------------|----------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 4.1        | 5.0        | 5.5      | 5.6        | 5.4        | KIFM-FM   | Smooth Jazz | Lincoln Financial | 98.1      | 26.5kw      | 2806                          | 28         | 24         | 14         | 4          | ①          | 8:00                           | IRS                  |
| 5.0        | 4.4        | 5.3      | 4.5        | 4.9        | KSON/KSOQ | Country     | Lincoln Financial | 97.3/92.1 | 7.4kw/0.6kw | 2692                          | 8          | 9          | 6          | 6          | 2          | 7:30                           | IRS                  |
| 5.5        | 4.4        | 4.6      | 5.2        | 4.8        | KYXY-FM   | AC          | CBS Radio         | 96.5      | 41kw        | 2878                          | 13         | 10         | 8          | 2          | 3          | 6:45                           | CHR                  |
| 3.3        | 3.9        | 3.7      | 3.7        | 4.3        | KMYI-FM   | Hot AC      | Clear Channel     | 94.1      | 10kw        | 3294                          | 4          | 4          | ①          | ①          | 5          | 5:30                           | CCRS                 |

**Figure 2.1:** Excerpt of Spring 2007 radio ratings for San Diego, California.

The radio format known as “smooth jazz” evolved from the label NAC, which stood for “new adult contemporary.” These radio stations had wide-ranging playlists that spanned contemporary jazz, easy listening, beautiful music, new age, and soft rock. Stations like KTWV 94.7 FM The Wave (Los Angeles), KIFM 98.1 FM (San Diego), KKSF 103.7 FM (San Francisco), and WNUA 95.5 FM (Chicago) were early trailblazers between 1987 and 1994, formulating programming that would evolve into a smooth jazz format. Radio & Records added “Smooth Jazz” besides “NAC” beginning in 1996, and dropped the “NAC” entirely by 2000. In total, smooth jazz thrived as a radio format for more

than two decades, peaking in popularity from the late 1990s through the middle of the first decade of the 2000s. Based on data provided in *Radio and Records Ratings Directories* available on AmericanRadioHistory.com, one can see in Figure 2.2 that smooth jazz was able to secure more than a 3% total share of all American radio listening between 1997 and 2004.



**Figure 2.2:** National listener share for NAC / Smooth Jazz radio format.

During 1997 and 2004, it would be expected that one out of every 30 Americans listening to FM radio would have been tuned in to a smooth jazz radio station, but the Format Focus sections of the *Radio and Records Ratings Directories* suggest that there was a regional popularity typifying smooth jazz listenership. Figure 2.3 contains an excerpt of the Format Focus for smooth jazz in Spring 2000, and the map reveals that the 2.5 national share achieved that quarter was driven by even higher listener shares in

the Pacific (3.9), Mid-Atlantic (3.0), Mountain (2.9), and East North Central (2.9) regions, but smooth jazz was not listened to as prominently in the South Central (0.9), West North Central (0.6), and New England (0.4).

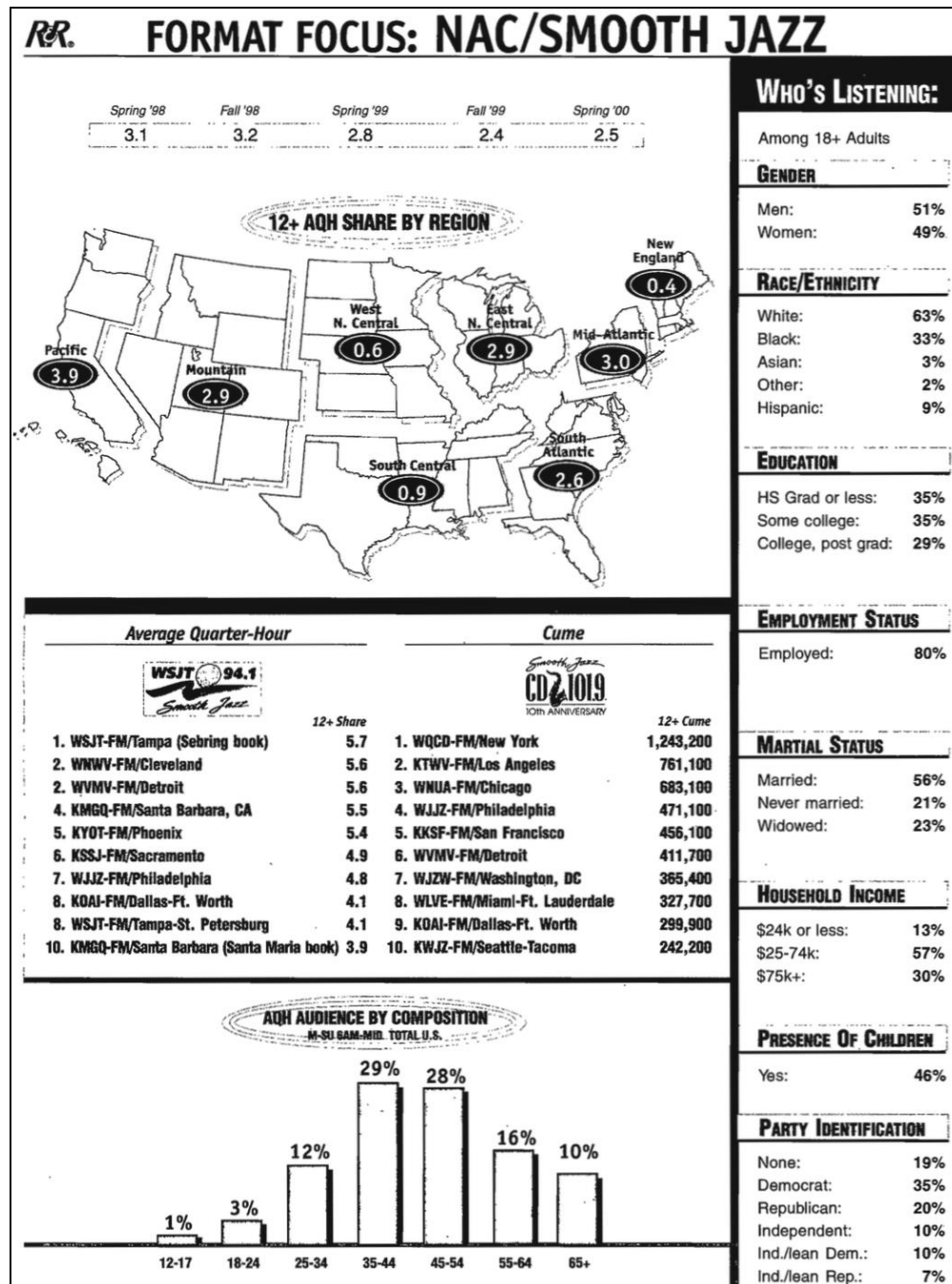
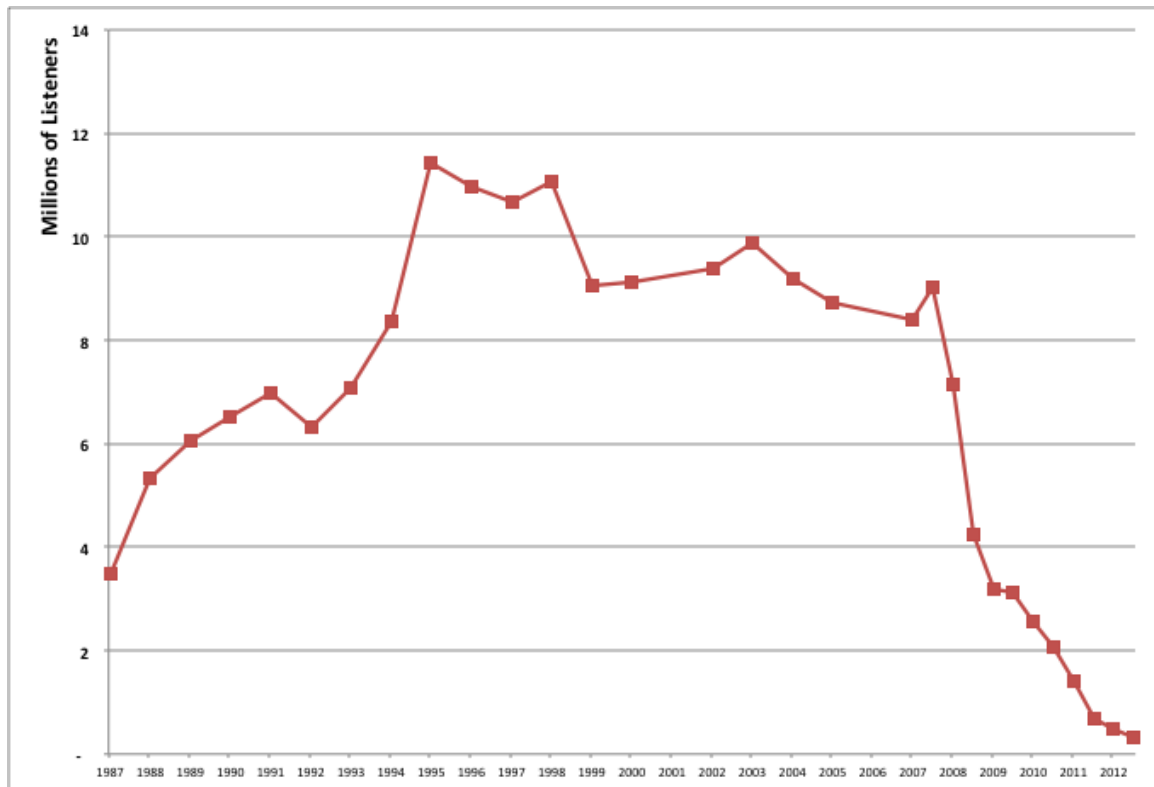


Figure 2.3: Spring 2000 Smooth Jazz Format Focus.

Three smooth jazz radio stations (WQCD 101.9 FM New York, WNUA 95.5 FM Chicago, and KTWV 94.7 FM Los Angeles) consistently ranked in the top 100 most-listened-to stations in the United States, based on their cumes, and collectively reached more than three million active smooth jazz listeners in their listening sheds.

As the smooth jazz radio format was maturing in the hands of broadcasting consultants and radio station personalities, the number of listeners grew rapidly, as illustrated in Figure 2.4. Beginning in 1994, smooth jazz radio reached more than eight million listeners for the first time, and would not fall below that level until fifteen years later in 2008. During the late 1990s, total listenership exceeded ten million people for several years. Washburne (2004) observed that when KJAZ in Alameda, California signed off the air in 1994, all commercial jazz stations on FM radio had adopted the smooth jazz format. He also noted that during “the late 1990s and early 2000s, smooth jazz stations garnered some of the highest Arbitron ratings. The top fifty smooth jazz stations had combined advertising revenues of over \$190 million each year. This is big business” (Washburne 2004, 132).

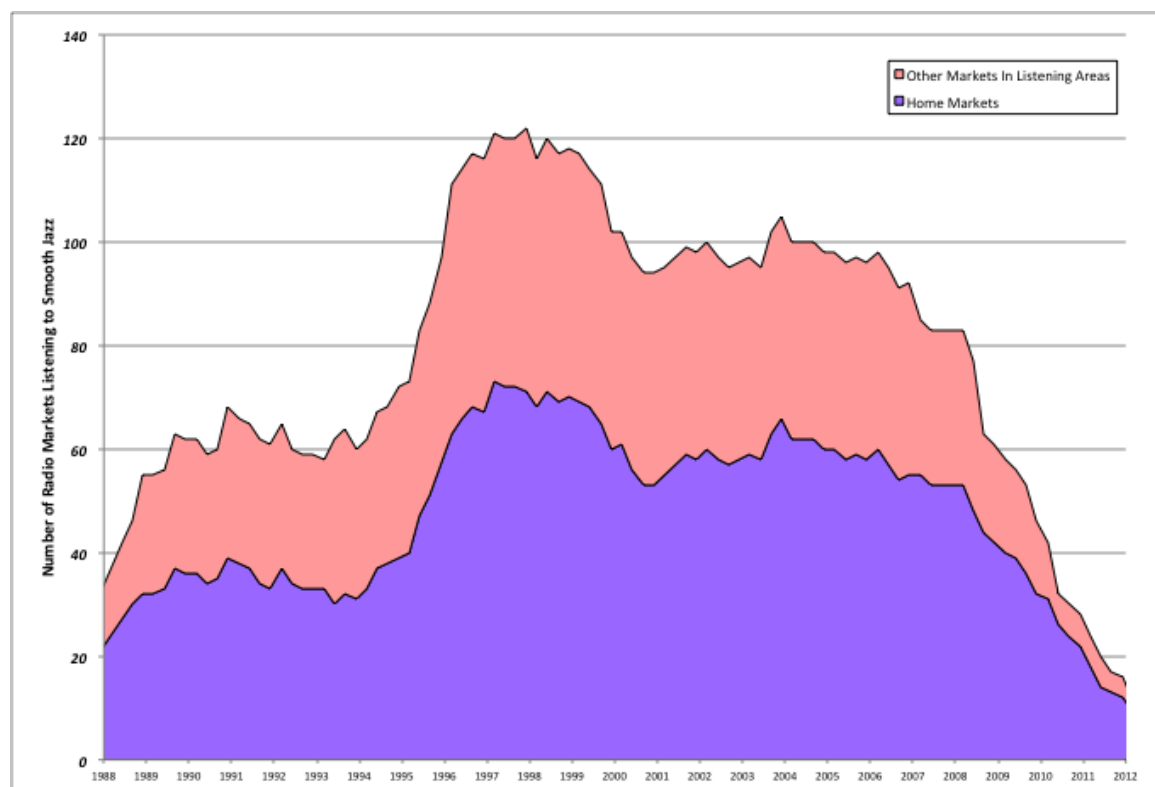


**Figure 2.4:** *Cume listeners to NAC / Smooth Jazz radio format.*  
*Source: Author's calculations and Statista (2013)*

Figure 2.5 illustrates the temporal market penetration of the smooth jazz radio format. Radio markets supporting their own radio station(s) and containing the antenna location(s) are represented in purple, while adjacent radio markets that are in the listening areas of these stations are delineated in pink and stacked on top. For example, San Francisco was the home market for KKSF 103.7 FM, a longtime smooth jazz radio station from 1987 to 2009, but in addition to a half million San Francisco listeners, KKSF also reached roughly 100,000 listeners from the nearby San Jose, Santa Rosa, and Stockton radio markets. Between 1993 and 2006, Philadelphia's WJJZ 106.1 regularly carried 400,000 listeners in the station's home market, but also reached another 100,000 listeners tuning in from adjacent markets in WJJZ's listening shed, including

Allentown-Bethlehem, Lancaster, Reading, Wilkes Barre-Scranton, Atlantic City-Cape May (NJ), Trenton (NJ), and Wilmington (DE).

By Fall 1987, there were 37 radio markets receiving broadcasts of stations classified as New Adult Contemporary / Smooth Jazz, and this penetration would grow to 83 markets by Fall 1994. In Fall 1995, the smooth jazz format could be heard in 111 radio markets, and the format peaked at a total of 122 radio markets in Summer 1997. Starting in 2004, smooth jazz started to decline, falling below 100 active radio markets for the final time in Summer 2004, dropping below 75 markets in Spring 2008, below 50 markets in Summer 2009, and below 25 markets by Fall 2010.



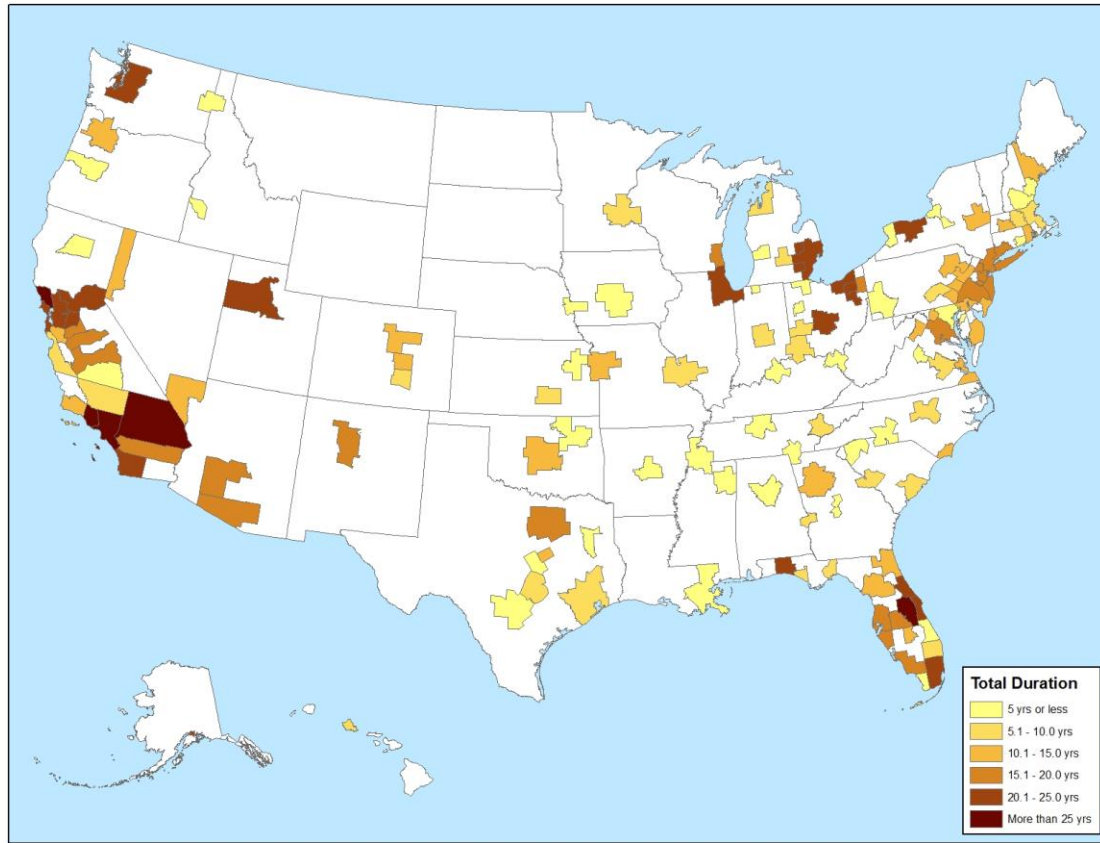
**Figure 2.5:** Smooth jazz radio market penetration.

In terms of total cume listeners and the number of radio markets in which the format could be heard, smooth jazz reached its peak during the late 1990s. Between



1999 and 2001, there was a slight drop in the number of radio stations carrying the smooth jazz format, however, there was a brief rebound between 2001 and 2004. It is probably not a coincidence that this resurgence in smooth jazz radio occurred in the period following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. It is already documented that easy listening and adult contemporary singers, such as Norah Jones and Josh Groban, enjoyed much success post-9/11 when people were “searching for solace and things that take them back to a safer time” (KJZI 2004). Jones and Groban both received airplay on smooth jazz radio as crossover vocalists interspersed among instrumental contemporary jazz sets. The unobtrusive, polished, relaxing sounds of smooth jazz are like a musical form of Prozac, and was a welcomed sound in the post-9/11 climate.

The map in Figure 2.6 shows the longevity of smooth jazz in American radio markets. Los Angeles, with original smooth jazz station KTWV 94.7 FM The Wave, and later KSBR 88.5 FM out of Orange County, has been the radio market with the highest longevity of smooth jazz, at more than 27 years and counting. Orlando ranked second, with WLOQ 103.1 FM and later 102.5 FM broadcasting smooth jazz for more than 26 years, before flipping to talk radio in February 2014. Other radio markets that had smooth jazz stations for more than 20 years included San Diego, Columbus (OH), Detroit, Rochester (NY), Seattle, Anchorage, Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Salt Lake City, Sacramento, and Fort Walton Beach (FL).

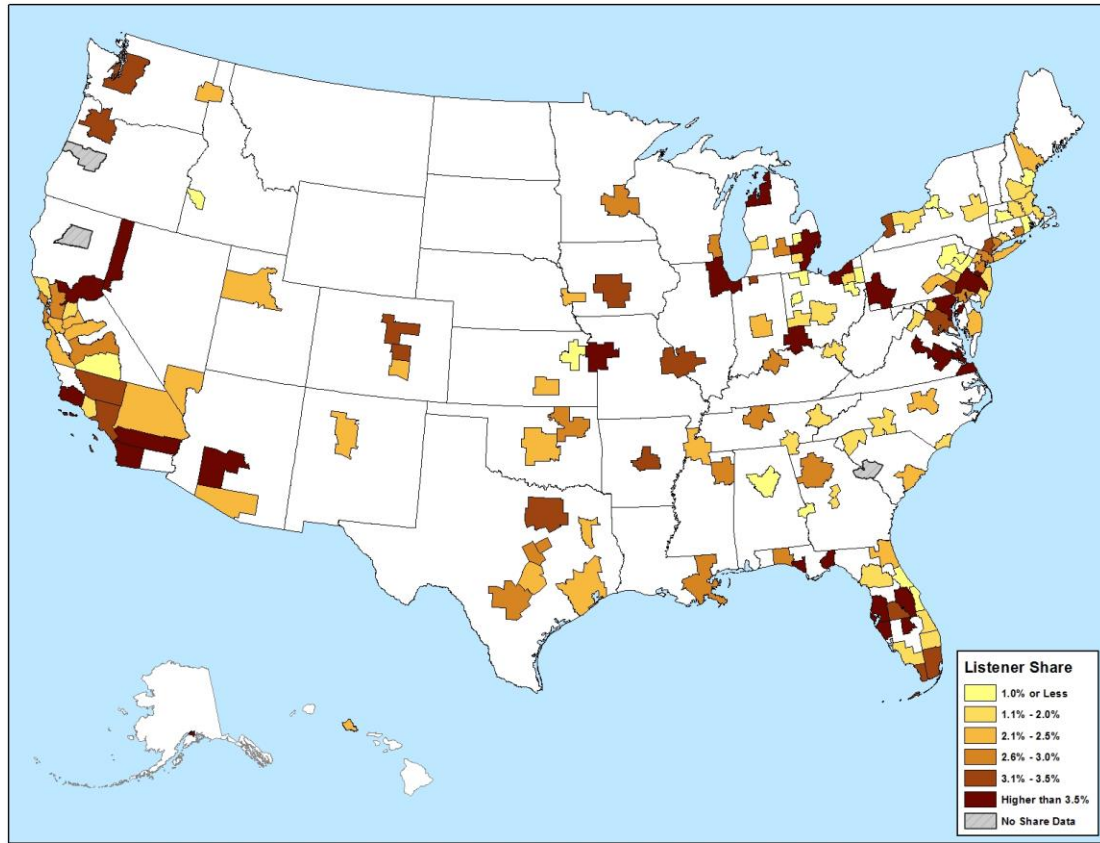


**Figure 2.6:** Total duration radio markets received smooth jazz format.

In terms of longevity, the smooth jazz radio format exhibited staying power in several regions, including the Pacific Coast (most notably California and Seattle), Florida, major cities of the Great Lakes, and the Mid-Atlantic. Salt Lake City, Denver, Phoenix, and Albuquerque provided the only bright spots within the Intermountain West. Atlanta and Dallas were the best performing markets in the South, and this music did not thrive much at all in New England. It is interesting that so many of the leading smooth jazz markets were in coastal areas, especially when one considers the names for many of these radio stations were water-inspired, such as The Wave, The Oasis, Seabreeze FM, and The River.

Out of the nation's top 20 radio markets, all but three had smooth jazz stations for at least 14 years, which included Houston (#6 market - 8.6 years), Boston (#10 - 6.3 years), and Minneapolis (#16 - 6.1 years). Of the top fifty radio markets in the United States, Pittsburgh (#25) only had smooth jazz on the air for 2.8 years, Nashville (#45) had it for 3.0 years, New Orleans (#47) 4.1 years, San Antonio (#28) 4.3 years, Charlotte (#24) 4.6 years, and Baltimore (#21) 4.7 years.

Another barometer of smooth jazz preference is the listener share that the format enjoyed while it was present in a particular radio market. After compiling the quarterly listener shares for all smooth jazz radio stations, the median rating for each market was calculated and mapped, as shown below in Figure 2.7. The highest median listener share for all smooth jazz markets was 5.6%, which was earned by Tallahassee, Florida throughout more than 9 years of broadcasting (including 7.8 and 7.3 shares in Spring and Fall of 1998, respectively). Santa Barbara, California had a median share of 4.6 over more than thirteen years of smooth jazz broadcasting. Thirteen markets exceeded median shares of 4.0, and 45 markets exceeded a median share of 3.0. For markets that hosted their own radio stations, Boise and Providence had the lowest median listener shares at 0.7 each, and of the 25 largest markets, Charlotte only managed a 1.9 share and Boston only secured a 2.0 share.

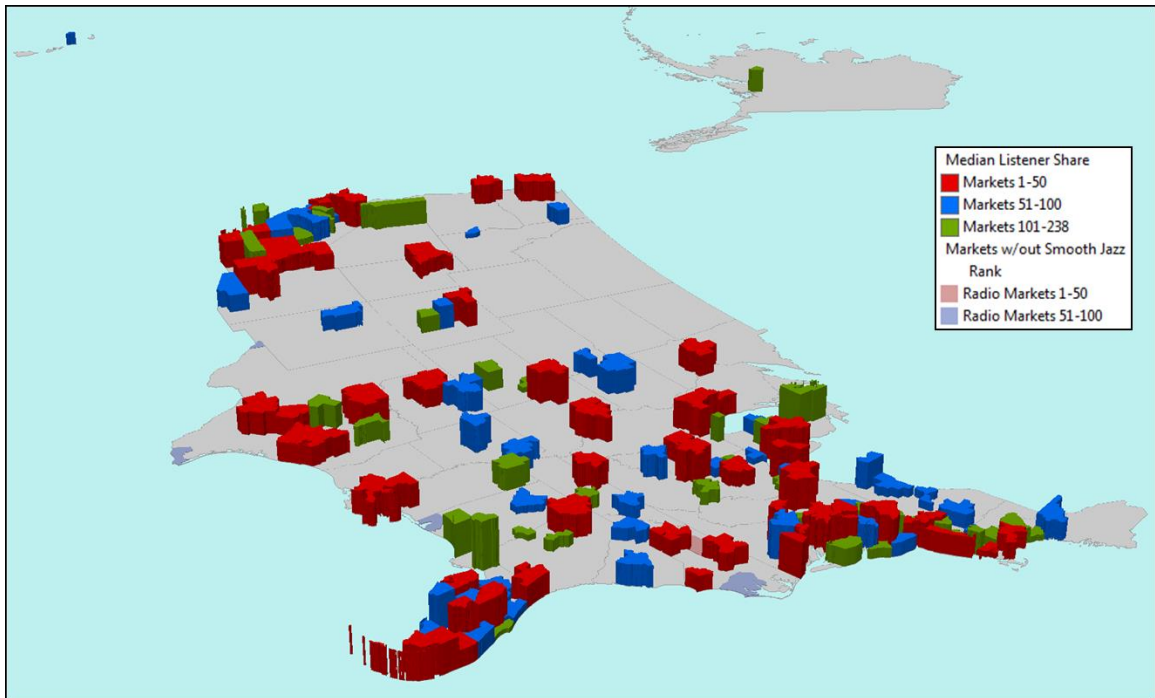


**Figure 2.7:** Median smooth jazz listener shares by radio market.

In Figure 2.8, the radio markets are extruded vertically on the basis of their median listener shares for smooth jazz while the format was available. In terms of market size, markets 1-50 are shown in red, markets 51-100 are shown in blue, and any smaller markets are represented in green.

California, Florida, and the Mid-Atlantic are filled with many tall, colorful “skyscrapers” indicating thorough market penetration with high listenership shares. Santa Barbara and Tallahassee are tall green towers, showing that they are small markets with high listener shares. In contrast, the heights of the radio markets in the

South are much lower, indicating noticeably lower listenership shares. Boise, with its 0.7 median share, barely rises out of the base map.



**Figure 2.8:** Radio market size vs. median listener share.

Several markets are colored but flat, indicating that smooth jazz radio was never attempted in these areas. The list of top 100 radio markets to have never received a station includes Greensboro, NC (#46), Hartford (#52), McAllen (#57), El Paso (#74), Baton Rouge (#81), Greenville, NC (#85), Columbia, SC (#87), Mobile (#97), and Madison (#99). Some of these, as in the cases of the markets along the Texas-Mexico border, can be explained by demographics, such as this music not rating highly among Hispanic audiences (Radio and Records 2008), or competition from other radio formats in other regions, such as country music in the South.

Smooth jazz could be heard at some point in 46 of the smaller markets indicated in green. While some of these were a product of adjacency to larger markets (i.e.,

Riverside's proximity to Los Angeles and Manchester's proximity to Boston), some of these markets chose to host their own smooth jazz stations, including Anchorage, Wichita, Traverse City, Tupelo, and Santa Barbara.

### ***Who listens to smooth jazz?***

In the Spring 1996 edition of the *R&R Ratings Report* (Radio and Records 1996, 18), Scarborough Research presented "characteristics and consumption profiles of 18+ adults who tune each of the nation's key radio formats" in 56 markets between 1994 and 1995. The audience of the New Adult Contemporary / Smooth Jazz format was associated with ownership of luxury cars, such as Jaguar, Mercedes Benz, BMW, and Volvo, staying at high-end hotels like the Fairmont, Ritz-Carlton, and Westin, and the most prominent beverages consumed included wine and bottled mineral water. For the sake of comparison, the country radio audience was most closely linked to characteristics of hunting, owning a domestic truck, and drinking Dr. Pepper, while listeners of the urban radio format were characterized by Democratic Party affiliation, video gaming systems, and soft drinks such as Mountain Dew and Slice (Radio and Records 1996, 19).

During the peak popularity of smooth jazz radio, the *R&R Ratings Reports* consistently reflected that smooth jazz had the most equal balance between male and female listenership of all radio formats, with men and women usually being within just a couple of percentage points of each other. In terms of race and ethnicity, the format had broad appeal, in most quarters usually comprising a breakdown approximating 65%

white, 30% African-American, 5% Asian, and 10% identifying as Hispanic. In regard to the African-American FM audience, smooth jazz was the second-most popular radio format, trailing only the urban format. The so-called “Lifestyle Groups” that were most prominent in smooth jazz radio listenership included “affluent empty-nesters,” “graying affluents,” and “affluent working women.” This affluence was also reflected in the figure of 57% of smooth jazz listeners holding white-collar jobs (second only behind 61% for adult alternative music) as of the Spring 1996 *R&R Ratings Report*.

Shortly after the successful debut of 94.7 FM “The Wave” in Los Angeles, this radio station was syndicated on an experimental basis in several radio markets across the country. The *Orlando Sentinel* educated its readers about smooth jazz in a 1987 article, introducing the format as having “tapped into a growing interest—among listeners 25 and over—in contemporary jazz and the mellow instrumentals of new-age music. Not surprisingly, it’s a sound aimed at well-educated, affluent listeners who are particularly attractive to advertisers. A Washington, D.C., station that features a Wave-style format has the conspicuously upscale call letters WBMW” (Duffy 1987).

In a fact sheet trying to drum up advertising business, smooth jazz radio station WSBZ 106.3 Seabreeze FM in Fort Walton Beach, Florida is currently using the tagline “More than just a format...it’s a lifestyle!” In a section portraying smooth jazz demographics, the station claims that “smooth jazz stations achieve impressive ratings and rank among the top five in the demographic of adults 25-54. The psychographics and demographics of the smooth jazz listener confirm an active, loyal and passionate audience. 70% of the smooth jazz audience is likely to earn more than \$75,000 annually

and 44% are more likely to have a college education.” The station goes on to state that its listeners enjoy a type of lifestyle typified by “fine restaurants, exquisite jewelry, and expensive foreign cars” (Seabreeze FM 2014). To put the smooth jazz demographic figures into perspective, according to recent surveys conducted by the United States Census Bureau on educational attainment (2013) and income (2014), only 28.9 percent of Americans age 18 and over have completed at least a bachelor’s degree, while only 34.4% of American households have an annual income of at least \$75,000, respectively.

Meanwhile, smooth jazz station KJJZ K-Jazz 102.3 FM out of the Palm Springs, California radio market portray its listeners as affluent couples who own their homes, with 96% of the audience made up of adults 35 years of age or older, and more likely to own luxury cars, buy expensive jewelry, play golf, and have leisure time (Marker Broadcasting 2005).

The bi-monthly periodical *Smooth Jazz News* describes itself as a “contemporary jazz lifestyle magazine” and for many years printed a slogan on the front cover reading “Jazz Buzz and the Succulent Life.”

### ***Why did smooth jazz disappear from terrestrial radio?***

It took a perfect storm to clear smooth jazz from the terrestrial airways following two decades of success. First, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 enabled deregulation, and allowed radio companies, such as Clear Channel, Cumulus, CBS, etc. to acquire the majority of the stations. Many smooth jazz stations suddenly had everything from their playlists down to their feeds, hosts, and jingles standardized to



where they were placeless, as a station in Tallahassee might sound exactly the same as the station in Lansing. Second, the target demographic of affluent 25-54 year olds that comprised the core of smooth jazz listeners during the format's peak in the late 1990s / early 2000s aged out of that industry-coveted bracket. Smooth jazz has not been successful in appealing to younger audiences to replenish this demographic, as many are drawn into listening to urban and rhythmic contemporary styles. It is not surprising, then, to see only a limited injection of youth into the ranks of smooth jazz performers, such as Aaron Bing, Vincent Ingala, Jessy J, and Oli Silk, while many of the smooth jazz musicians who were popular during the format's peak are still actively recording and performing. Third, the Great Recession struck in 2007, and the disposable income that so characterized this audience was diminished. Finally, and most importantly, Arbitron began to replace its traditional handwritten listening diaries with portable people meters (PPMs) to more accurately detect how many people were listening to stations. Survey panelists would simply wear the PPM, which would listen for tones in broadcasts, and automatically report data about stations and durations listened to. What became apparent was that smooth jazz had a substantial loyal audience, with respectable listening shares and time spent listening, but the cume figures so highly coveted by the radio industry were not there. Commercial radio's goal is to reach as many people as possible and bring in advertising revenue. One measure of a radio format's commercial success is the power ratio, which divides a format's revenue share by its audience (listenership) share. In 2009, the smooth jazz radio format was responsible for generating 2.38% of all radio revenue, but carried 3.32% of all radio listenership,

yielding a power ratio of only 0.72, the lowest power ratio of all 25 formats (Miller Kaplan 2009). When a media giant like Clear Channel decided that smooth jazz was no longer profitable on the air, the smooth jazz stations quickly started to flip to other formats in most of the top markets in the country. Several smooth jazz stations, such as San Diego's KIFM and Gainesville's WXJZ followed the lead of The Wave by gradually transitioning from smooth jazz to smooth R&B to urban adult contemporary in pursuit of an improved target demographic, while other stations flipped to rhythmic pop, adult album alternative, and other formats.

### ***Where can you continue to hear smooth jazz?***

As of the writing of this article, smooth jazz has been able to maintain a presence on a small number of commercial FM radio stations, including KJJZ 102.3 (Palm Springs, CA), WSBZ 106.3 (Fort Walton Beach, FL), WEIB 106.3 (Springfield, MA), KJZY 93.7 (Santa Rosa, CA), WLOQ 102.5 (Orlando, FL), and WJZR 105.9 (Rochester, NY). Smooth jazz has also found a home on some non-commercial and educational FM radio stations, which typically reside in the FCC's reserved band of frequencies between 88 and 92 MHz, such as KSBR 88.5 Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, CA, filling the void left on the L.A. radio market by the flip of original smooth jazz station KTWV 94.7 The Wave to adult contemporary. Smooth jazz also receives about half the programming on WCLK 91.9 FM at Clark Atlanta University and WSNC 90.5 FM at Winston-Salem State University.

For listeners with HD radios, they can listen to smooth jazz for free on HD feeds on the sub-bands in 46 different markets, including all of the top ten radio markets

except Washington, D.C. 29 of these 46 markets broadcast the Smooth Jazz Network, a 24-hour music network programmed by Allen Kepler of Broadcast Architecture, that includes a weekly Top 20 countdown and a morning show cohosted by Kenny G. The network is also available in several markets via AM stations (e.g., Detroit, Seattle, and Springfield, MO) and regular FM stations (e.g., Cleveland, Riverside, CA, Gainesville, FL).

Starting in 2002, satellite radio became an attractive home for smooth jazz, which could be heard commercial free, both on Sirius channel Jazz Café and XM channel Watercolors. When Sirius and XM merged in 2008, Jazz Café was dropped, but Watercolors was retained, and can currently be heard on channel 66. Sirius XM has never encoded its signal for use with portable people meters, so the most recent data available on listenership comes from a 2007 listening diary survey conducted by Arbitron. Sirius' Jazz Café had a cume of 144,400 listeners between 6a-midnight, ranking 30th out of 129 stations. XM's Watercolors had a cume of 359,800 listeners between 6a-midnight, ranking 17th out of 191 stations. Between the hours of 7p-midnight, Jazz Café and Watercolors improved their overall rankings to 26th and 11th, respectively. These smooth jazz stations were only out-rated by decade-specific channels, current pop and country hits, comedy, and Howard Stern. Smooth jazz enjoyed a higher listenership on satellite radio than hip-hop, contemporary Christian, adult album alternative, sports, and news stations (Arbitron 2007).

Internet streaming is also a very popular contemporary source for listening to smooth jazz, exemplified by SmoothJazz.com reporting that it "broadcasts an average of 49 million listener hours per month, while the site enjoys nearly 300,000 unique

visitors/month” (<http://www.smoothjazz.com/meetus/#history>). SKY.FM, AIRChicago (smooth jazz with brief breaks devoted to information about O’Hare and Midway airports), IHeartRadio, and iTunesRadio are examples of other online access to this music.

Clearly, contemporary/smooth jazz is still alive and well, despite being phased out as a traditional terrestrial radio format. By now being made available for consumption through satellite radio and online offerings, smooth jazz actually enjoys a greater geographic penetration and has become free of the corporate agendas of commercial radio, allowing it to exist more freely and organically as a musical genre.

### **On Stage: The Geography of Live Smooth Jazz Performances**

While the broadcasting perspective has been an interesting start to the exploration of the geography of smooth jazz consumption, an examination of where musicians go on tour and get to directly interact with their audiences likely reveals even more about where the greatest passion exists surrounding this style of music.

Given that “smooth jazz” was originally a label bestowed by the radio industry, when considered as a musical genre, it is a crossover category that includes aspects including, but not limited to jazz, new age, fusion, soul, R&B, pop, and world music. Thus, it was necessary to come up with a definitive classification of which artists and groups would be included and excluded from this study. One of the largest online music databases is Rovi Corporation’s *All Music Guide*, which evolved from a series of reference books, first published in 1992 (Erlewine 1992). The database includes

metadata about artists, albums, and tracks, and Rovi maintains a staff of editors to review music and classify content. The *All Music Guide* has a genre category of Smooth Jazz, defined as:

*Smooth Jazz is an outgrowth of fusion, one that emphasizes its polished side. Generally, smooth jazz relies on rhythms and grooves instead of improvisation. There are layers of synthesizers, lite-funk rhythms, lite-funk bass, elastic guitars, and either trumpets, alto, or soprano saxophones. The music isn't cerebral, like hard bop, nor is it gritty and funky like soul-jazz or groove -- it is unobtrusive, slick, and highly polished, where the overall sound matters more than the individual parts (Rovi 2013).*

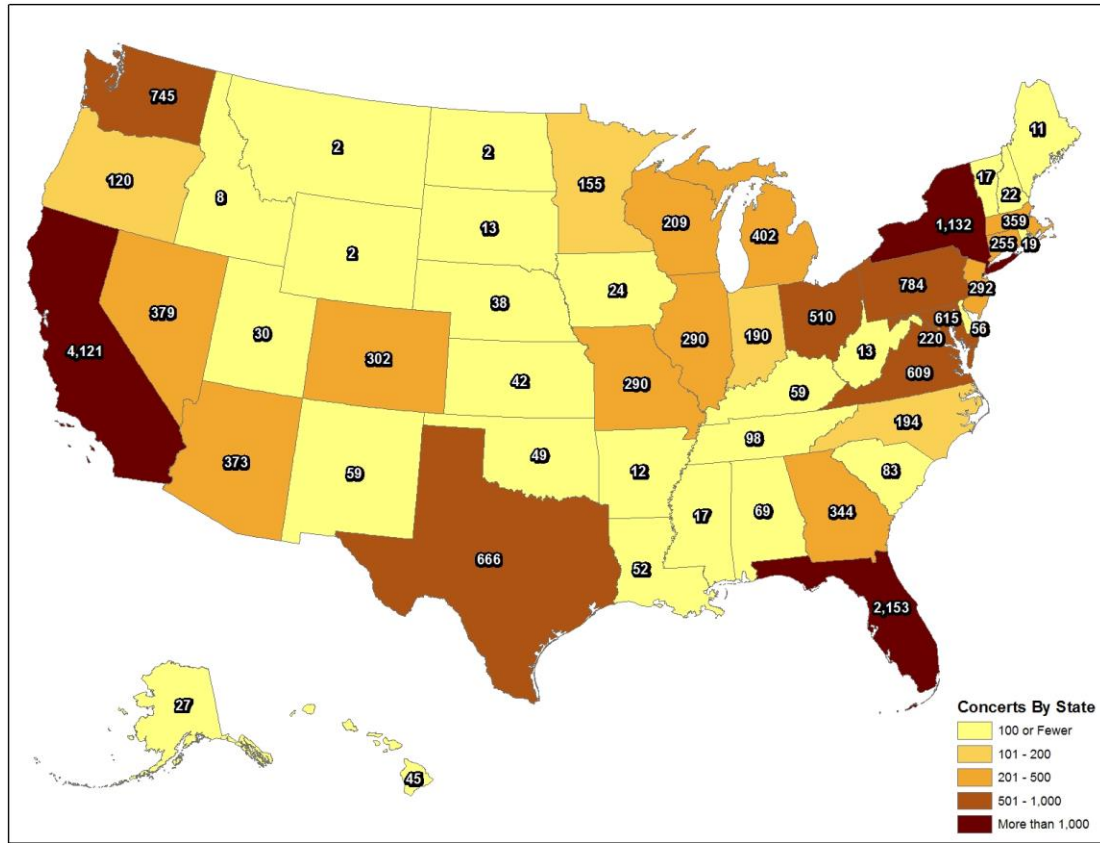
Using Rovi's application programming interface (API), biographical information about 203 smooth jazz artists and groups was retrieved. Then, in order to see where smooth jazz musicians have performed, a subscription to *PollstarPro*, a comprehensive database of touring histories and concert industry information, was accessed to gather data on performances between 1999 and 2013.

Queries were submitted to the *PollstarPro* database with the full list of smooth jazz artists delineated by the *AllMusic* API, from A to Z, or rather from Acoustic Alchemy to the Yellowjackets. Not all of the artists classified as smooth jazz in the *All Music Guide* had concert listings in *PollstarPro*, but some artists appeared in multiple acts, such as Rick Braun, who appeared both as a soloist and as a member of the B.W.B. (Norman Brown, Kirk Whalum, and Rick Braun) tour.

Between 1999 and 2013, there were 19,652 performances made by 204 unique smooth jazz acts at 3,665 venues. These performances found smooth jazz artists performing in 84 different countries across six continents, with 16,588 of the shows (84.4%) taking place in the United States, followed by Japan (688 concerts, 3.5%), the

United Kingdom (461, 2.3%), Italy (213, 1.1%), Germany (199, 1.0%), and Canada (195, 1.0%). On tour, smooth jazz artists have covered an incredible 108 degrees of latitude, with Kenny G performing as far north as the Hering Auditorium in Fairbanks, while George Benson and Lee Ritenour have performed as far south as the Town Hall Auditorium in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Aggregating the performances by state (see Figure 2.9 and Table 2.1), it can be seen that during this fifteen-year period, smooth jazz artists performed in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. California hosted 4,121 concerts, representing nearly one-quarter (24.9%) of all the American shows, nearly twice that of the second-most state, Florida (2,153 concerts, 13.0%), followed by New York (1,132, 6.8%), Pennsylvania (784, 4.7%), and Washington (745, 4.5%).

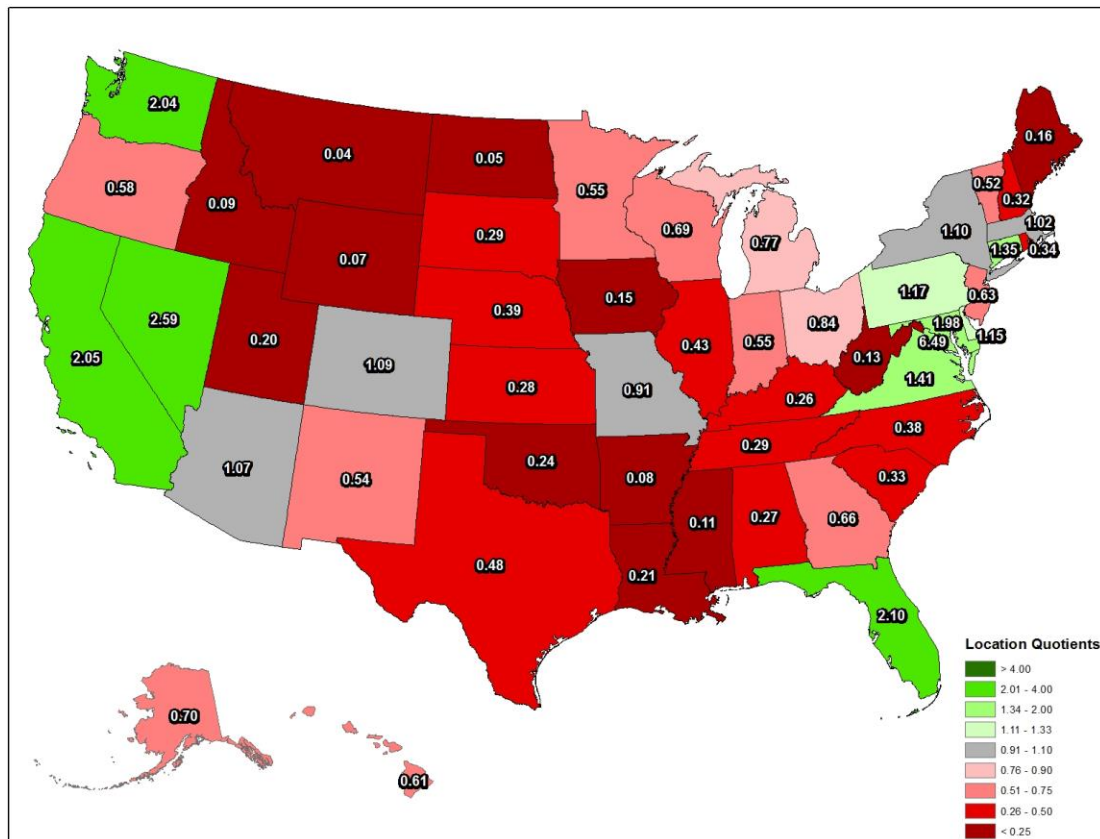


**Figure 2.9:** Smooth jazz concerts per state.

| Rank | State        | Concerts | Percent |
|------|--------------|----------|---------|
| 1    | California   | 4,121    | 24.9%   |
| 2    | Florida      | 2,153    | 13.0%   |
| 3    | New York     | 1,132    | 6.8%    |
| 4    | Pennsylvania | 784      | 4.7%    |
| 5    | Washington   | 745      | 4.5%    |
| 6    | Texas        | 666      | 4.0%    |
| 7    | Maryland     | 615      | 3.7%    |
| 8    | Virginia     | 609      | 3.7%    |
| 9    | Ohio         | 510      | 3.1%    |
| 10   | Michigan     | 402      | 2.4%    |

**Table 2.1:** States hosting the most smooth jazz performances (1999-2013).

In order to better measure regional patterns of smooth jazz consumption, the concert data can be converted to location quotients (see Figure 2.10), which serve to compare a state's performances per capita against that at the national level. A location quotient of 1 is indicative of the national average of 52.4 concerts per million people over the fifteen-year period. States in gray, such as Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, New York, and Massachusetts, all had location quotients closest to 1. States with higher rates of concerts per capita than the national average have location quotients above one, shown in green, while states below the national concertizing rate are represented in red. The darker shades represent more extreme deviation from the national average.



**Figure 2.10:** Location quotients for smooth jazz concerts per state.



The location quotients reveal three regions of particular strength when it comes to hosting live smooth jazz performances. First, the west coast contains California (2.05), Nevada (2.59), and Washington (2.04), which all outpaced the national average by more than twice the rate of concerts per capita. Second, Florida, with a location quotient of 2.10, stands out as another hotbed of live smooth jazz. Finally, a cluster of states in the Mid-Atlantic, including Virginia (1.41), Maryland (1.98), Pennsylvania (1.17), Delaware (1.15), and the District of Columbia (6.49), also have had remarkable pull in bringing in smooth jazz performers to their venues.

In contrast, large portions of the country have not been such prominent places to hear smooth jazz performed live. The lowest location quotients, shown in darkest red, occur in the upper Rockies (Montana's location quotient of 0.04 was the lowest of all states) and the South Central. Despite Texas hosting 666 concerts, which was sixth-most among all states, when its population of over 26 million is considered, its location quotient is only 0.48, meaning that the Lone Star State had less than half the nationwide live performance rate when normalizing for population. The South, northern New England, and the Great Lakes also lagged behind.

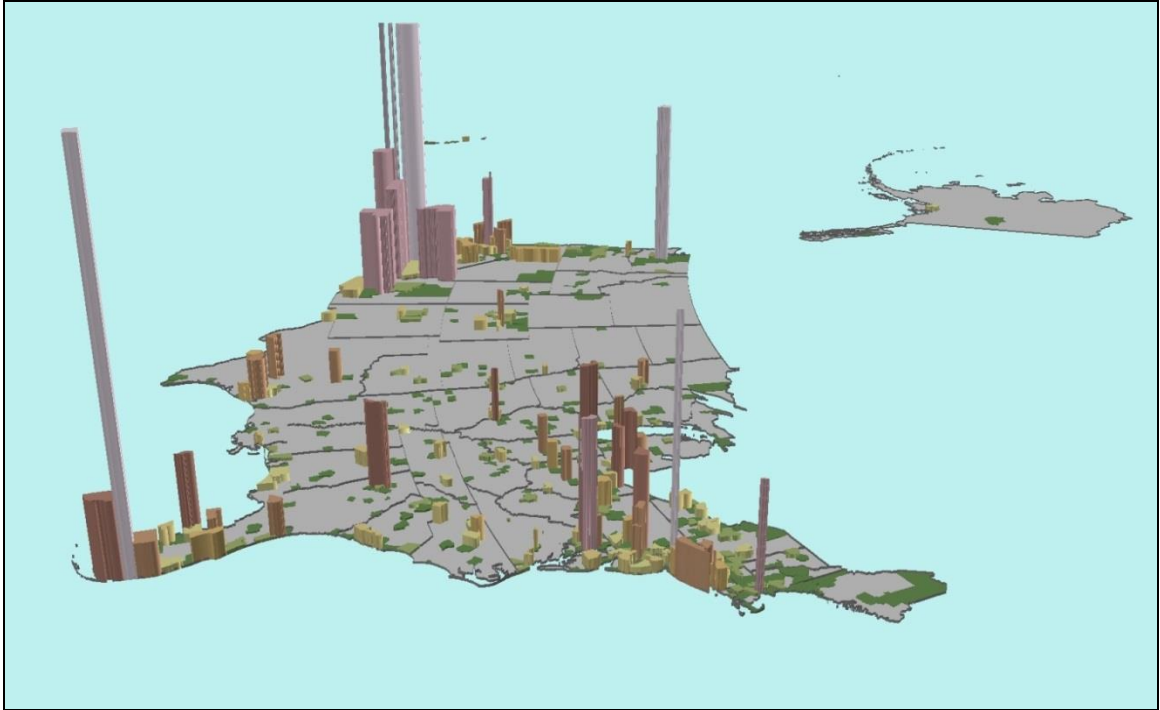
By geocoding the locations of the venues, the concerts could be aggregated by radio markets. The Los Angeles radio market, which has broadcast smooth jazz the longest of any radio market, and was home to the very first smooth jazz radio station, hosted the most performances of any radio market, with 1,441 concerts (8.7% of all U.S. shows) taking place at venues across Los Angeles and Orange Counties. Miami, despite being only the 11th largest radio market in age 12+ population, attracted the second-

largest number of concerts (1,285 shows, 7.7% of U.S. shows). In terms of smooth jazz concert frequency, five of the top ten radio markets were in California (L.A. #1, San Francisco #3, San Diego #8, Riverside #9, and Palm Springs #10).

For the purpose of visualization, Figures 2.11 and 2.12 present perspective plots of smooth jazz concerts performed by county. Once again, the performers find their audiences in California, Florida, Seattle, the Mid-Atlantic, and the larger cities of the Great Lakes region. Las Vegas and Phoenix are easy add-on tour stops for artists who are already playing shows (or have their home base) in California. Other than that, the only notable concert centers are Atlanta, and the triangle in Texas connecting Houston, Dallas, and Austin/San Antonio.

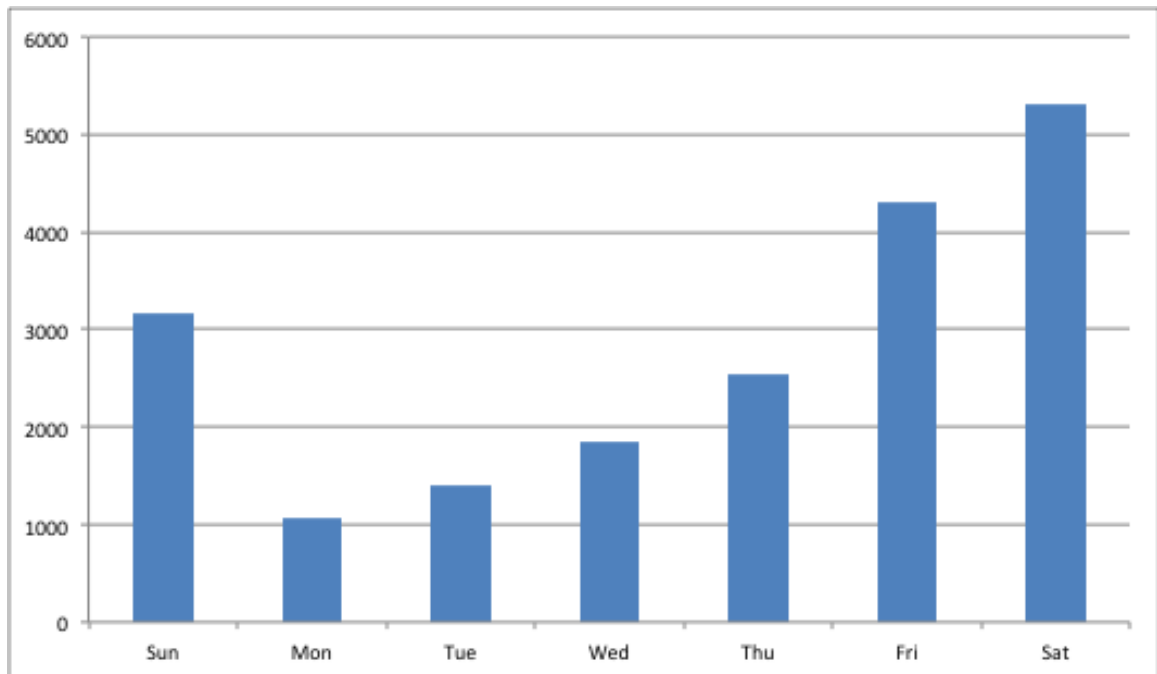


**Figure 2.11:** Perspective plot: Concerts per county, viewed from Southwest.

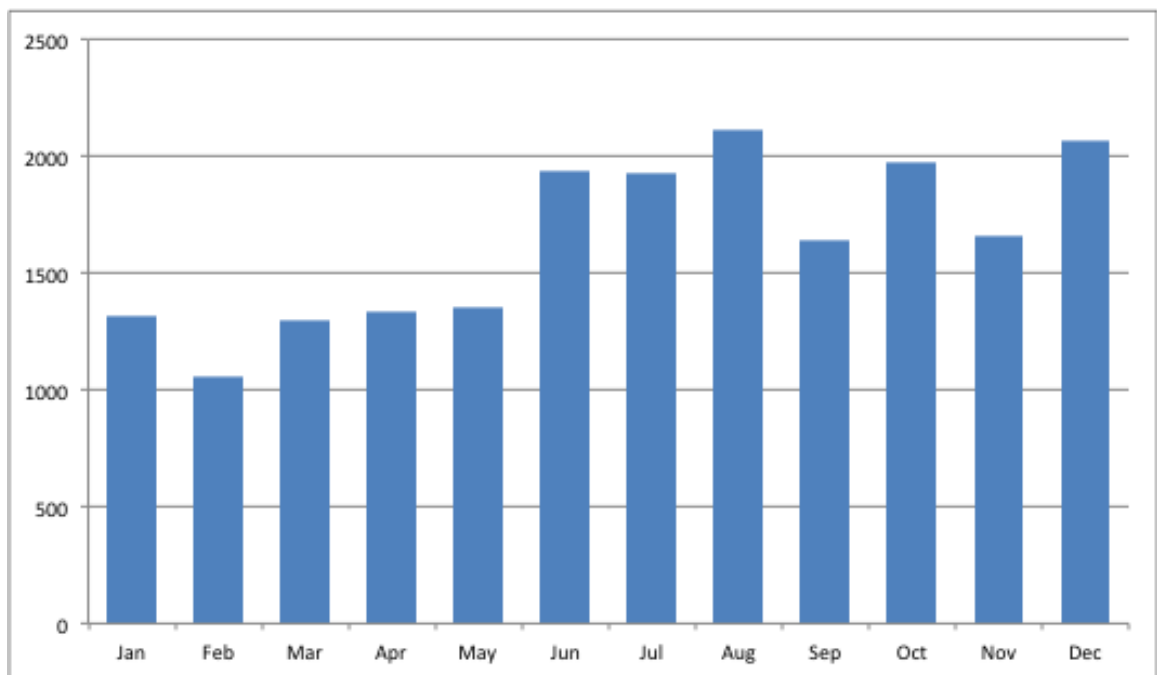


**Figure 2.12:** Perspective plot: Concerts per county, viewed from Atlantic Coast.

In terms of when the concerts took place, the weekends were most popular, as seen in Figure 2.13, with Saturday (27%) leading the way, followed by Friday (22%) and Sunday (16%), in contrast with weekdays, which comprised of Mondays (5%), Tuesdays (7%), Wednesdays (9%), and Thursdays (13%). As for the time of year when smooth jazz artists are most active with their touring itineraries, Figure 2.14 reveals that fall (30.5%) slightly edged summer (29.8%), followed by spring (22.6%) and winter (17.0%). These trends seem logical because they follow that people are probably going to have the most leisure time on weekends and during the summers. Since a large percentage of smooth jazz concerts are held outdoors, summer and fall offer the best weather for jazz festivals and concerts in the park. Late-fall concertizing also receives a boost from popular Christmas-themed smooth jazz shows.



**Figure 2.13:** Smooth jazz concerts per day of week.



**Figure 2.14:** Smooth jazz concerts per month.

### ***Smooth Jazz Venues and Performance Space***

Of the top 25 most-played venues for smooth jazz (refer to Figure 2.15 on next page) between 1999 and 2013, 23 venues were located in the United States, with the only international sites including Blue Note Tokyo (#5 overall, 298 shows), a jazz and supper club based on Blue Note New York (#4 overall, 306 shows), and the PizzaExpress Jazz Club in London (#22 overall, 91 shows), found in the basement of a pizza restaurant. Dimitriou's Jazz Alley in Seattle took top honors with 428 shows (an average of more than 28 shows per year), followed by two popular supper clubs serving the Washington, D.C. area, Rams Head On Stage in Annapolis and the Birchmere in Alexandria (357 shows each). California was well represented again, home to 10 of the top 25 venues, providing many opportunities for fans to hear smooth jazz, including the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts in Los Angeles County, a couple of hotels with popular summer jazz series at their own outdoor amphitheaters (Hyatt Regency Newport Beach and Radisson/Red Lion Sacramento), Thornton Winery in Temecula, and the Avalon Casino Ballroom that has played home to the long-running Catalina Island JazzTrax Festival that is currently in its 28th year.

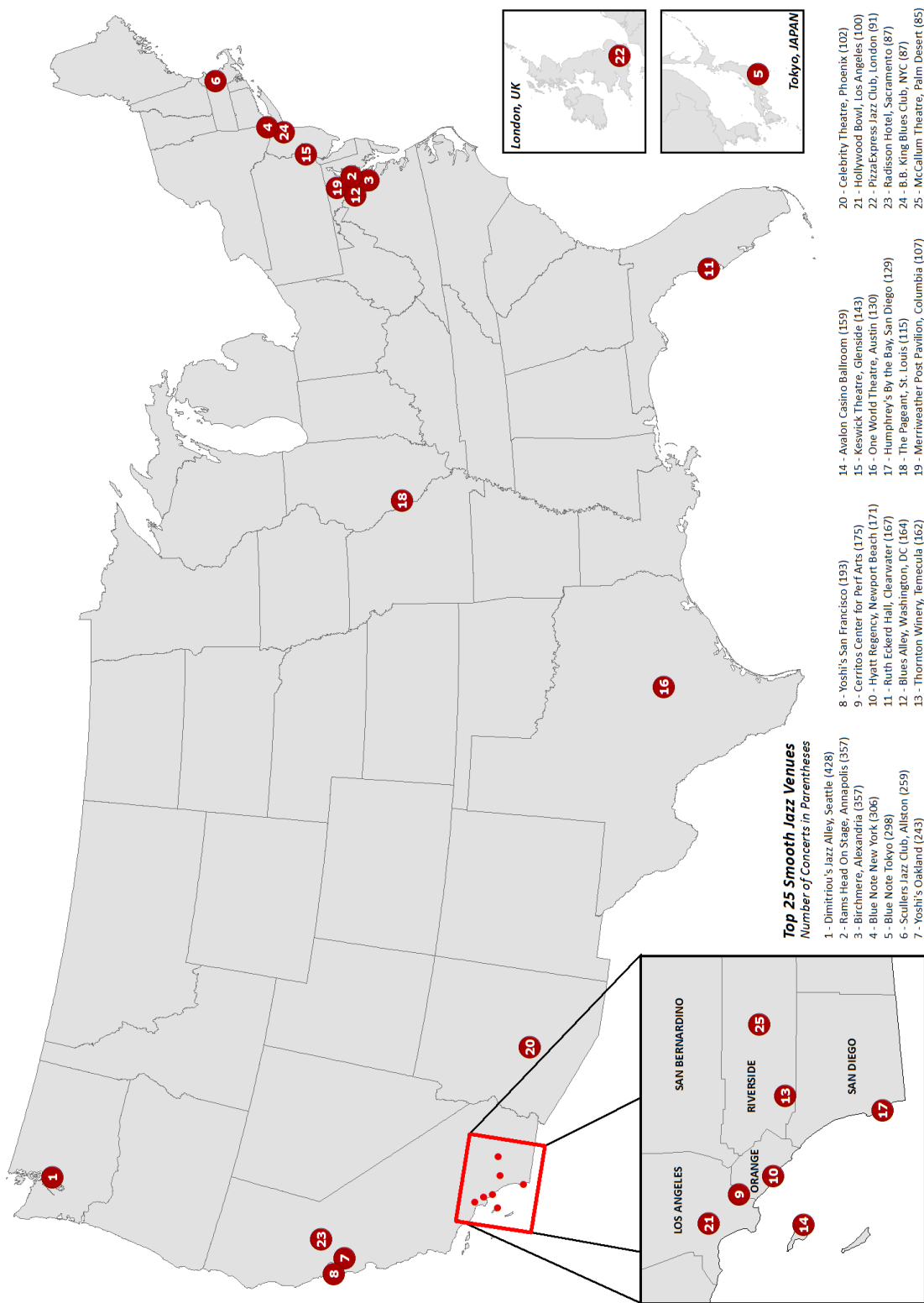


Figure 2.15: Top 25 smooth jazz venues.

Back in 2004, saxophonist Warren Hill came up with the idea to host and perform with fellow artists on a smooth jazz cruise. Musicians and fans boarded the Costa Atlantica in Fort Lauderdale for a January voyage to the Caribbean, which featured smooth jazz concerts at sea (Hill 2014). What originally started as a novelty that shared a portion of a small cruise ship would in future years evolve into quite an enterprise, with Michael Lazaroff, executive director of St. Louis-based Entertainment Cruise Productions, turning Warren Hill's idea into a legitimate industry, chartering out large cruise ships operated by Holland America and Royal Caribbean for multiple week-long smooth jazz-themed voyages each year (Coveney 2006). Before long, the late bassist Wayman Tisdale was entertaining cruise-goers en route to the Caribbean, and saxophonist Dave Koz was serenading jazz fans annually to Mexico, Alaska, and the Mediterranean. A group in Washington, D.C. who had been running the Capital Jazz Fest followed Lazaroff's model by starting their own Capital Jazz TheSuperCruise, which originally departed from Baltimore, but has grown in popularity and now makes annual voyages from the port at Fort Lauderdale.

As of Summer 2014, there have been 35 week-long smooth jazz cruises completed since Warren Hill's 2004 maiden voyage, and another 5 cruises are already scheduled through October 2015. In addition to cruising, smooth jazz fans in the New York City area are quite familiar with jazz yachting, through a summer jazz series, now in its seventeenth year, comprised exclusively of weeknight dinner concerts on the Hudson River (Smooth Jazz New York 2014). In a *New York Times* article featuring the Spirit of New York Smooth Cruise series, Nate Chinen (2013) remarked that, "Since the great

radio purges of 2008 and 2009, when stations across the country abandoned the format, smooth jazz has been not just maligned but also marginalized—stripped of its main distribution channel just as the record business was falling to pieces. The only recourse for its musicians and fans has been to adapt, regrouping now as a subculture, often literally at sea.”

Back on land, most smooth jazz concerts are performed at intimate venues with a capacity of just a few hundred people. Jazz/supper clubs, small theatres, performing arts centers, and casinos have been perfect fits. When smooth jazz goes outside, it is extremely popular in scenic places, often with waterfront, at parks, and even at wineries.

The nine smooth jazz concert venues with the most shows over the past fifteen years have been jazz and supper clubs. Unlike other genres of music, smooth jazz audiences actually make use of their seats. In addition, they also tend to prefer having tables for enjoying food and drinks during the show. These supper clubs usually have a capacity of 200-300 people, and may specialize in jazz, but also other styles, including blues, soul, R&B, or world beat. Yoshi’s in Oakland and San Francisco, ranked #7 and #8 in overall concert frequency, is an unusual twist on the traditional club, as these are upscale Japanese restaurants featuring both a sushi bar and stage.

In other venues, where food and drink are not part of the performance space, the music can receive the undivided attention of the listener, and performing arts centers and small theatres are great fits. The Celebrity Theatre in Phoenix is a theatre-in-the-round with a rotating stage, giving everyone a great view. In the “Live Music



Capital of the World,” Austin, the One World Theatre sits on a bluff in the Texas Hill Country and offers 300 people an intimate experience with all seats within 50 feet of the stage. Popular performing arts centers can be found in Cerritos and Palm Desert (McCallum Theatre). It is not uncommon to hear smooth jazz performed at auditoriums on university, college, and even high school campuses.

The recent growth of casinos as concert spaces has been a boon for smooth jazz. Artists have performed more than 400 shows over the past fifteen years at 87 casinos. Outside of 179 concerts held at 14 hotel-and-casinos in the Las Vegas and Reno metropolitan areas, smooth jazz performers most notably frequented Milwaukee’s Northern Lights Theater (Potawatomi Bingo Casino) 23 times, took the stage 15 times at San Felipe Casino Hollywood (NM), and 11 live performances took place both at Hammond, Indiana’s Venue at Horseshoe Casino and Temecula, California’s Pechanga Resort and Casino. Smooth jazz casino concerts have been held in 19 states, 5 Canadian provinces, and in Australia, France, Switzerland, Portugal, and South Africa.

If one cannot hear smooth jazz directly on the seas aboard a cruise or yacht, the next best thing might be to sit waterfront. There is a longstanding tradition of this music being performed seaside, whether at Humphrey’s Concerts By the Bay on San Diego’s Shelter Island, which won the 2001 Oasis Contemporary Jazz Award for Best Venue (Suzuki 2014), or at Southern California’s Big Bear Lake JazzTrax Summer Music Festival, currently in its 9th season, which features performers on a floating stage. The Long Beach Jazz Festival is held annually at Rainbow Lagoon, concertgoers in Florida can hear smooth jazz while gazing out into the Gulf of Mexico at either Pier Park in Panama

City or Coachman Park in Clearwater. The Detroit River has served as the backdrop for 53 concerts performed at the Motor City's Chene Park.

Smooth jazz recordings are often played over the loudspeakers in hotels, so much so that it is almost part of an aural architecture, but hotels are another type of venue where live smooth jazz performances are also prominent. Hotels, resorts, and spas have been featuring smooth jazz artists in concert for decades on their grounds, including amphitheaters, lounges, and clubs. In addition to the Hyatt Regency Newport Beach and Radisson (now Red Lion) Sacramento that made the top 25 list of most-frequented smooth jazz venues, other notable hotel/resort venues have included the Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin (28 shows), the Ritz Carlton in Half Moon Bay, California (23 shows), the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort (17 shows) and Omni La Costa Resort (15 shows), both in Carlsbad, California, and the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort (13 shows). For several years, bassist Gerald Veasley even operated his own club called The Jazz Base at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Reading, Pennsylvania.

There has become quite an association between smooth jazz and wine. Krin Gabbard (1995, 1-2) noticed the increasing cultural capital of jazz, pointing out that "Advertisers no longer use jazz to connote the nightlife and slumming that can be purchased along with their products—jazz can now signify refinement and upper-class status, once the exclusive province of classical music." For more than a decade, Internet radio station SmoothJazz.com has offered a Wine and Jazz Club, in which club members receive a different bottle of wine and a new smooth jazz CD in the mail to sample each month. So, it should come as no surprise that wineries have become popular venues for

smooth jazz. Not only does southern California's Temecula Wine Country boast the Thornton Winery, now in the 26th year of its Champagne Jazz Series, but over the years, nearby Wilson Creek Winery, South Coast Winery, and Pointe Family Estate have also brought in artists including Steve Cole, Michael Lington, Jeff Lorber, and Chieli Minucci. No fewer than 19 other California vineyards up and down the coast have played home to smooth jazz concerts over the past 15 years. Outside the Golden State, the Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery in Woodinville, Washington has hosted 54 smooth jazz concerts since 1999, 7 shows have been played at Glenora Wine Cellars in Dundee, New York, and trumpeter Chris Botti once entertained internationally at Mission Hill Winery in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.

## **Conclusion**

Born initially as an American radio format, smooth jazz has been commercially successful for several decades, since its emergence in the late 1980s as a synthesis of jazz, new age, R&B, soul, and world music. Pioneering stations in Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, New York, and Orlando were responsible for defining the format and led to its expansion into new markets. Based on factors of market penetration, station longevity, and listener shares, smooth jazz enjoyed its greatest success in the city of Seattle, the states of California and Florida, and the Mid-Atlantic region. While this study has focused exclusively on American radio broadcasting due to the fact that data was readily available from Radio and Records and Arbitron/Nielsen, it should be noted that smooth jazz only made brief, small splashes on radio abroad in Canada, Europe,

Australia, Japan, and The Philippines. In Canada's case, the small number of smooth jazz musicians hailing from that country (i.e., Four80East, Warren Hill, and Jesse Cook) was likely a disadvantage in being able to meet the country's Canadian Content regulations. Keyboardist Philippe Saisse has stated, "The biggest stars in smooth jazz are only stars in the U.S. Even Kenny G. doesn't really have a career in Europe" (Adler 2012).

By the end of the first decade of this century, smooth jazz declined and eventually disappeared from terrestrial radio. Factors including an aging listener demographic, precipitously lower radio ratings attributed to a change in survey techniques from listener diaries to portable people meters, and an economic recession that struck a blow to a listener base that has traditionally been relatively very affluent collectively led to the format's demise. However, at the same time, smooth jazz was able to shake the corporate standardization of programming and the geographic constraint of listening sheds around station antennas by finding new opportunities online and on satellite radio. Denis Poole, one of England's biggest fans of smooth jazz, writes reviews and blogs on his Web site [www.smoothjazztherapy.com](http://www.smoothjazztherapy.com). Poole believes that smooth jazz has "got a following out there more as a live genre than a recorded one. People come out in number to support concerts and festivals and the various things that the hotels put on. The Newport Beach Hyatt always gets well supported, and the Thornton Winery is legendary for putting on shows right through the summer. So that's bucking the trend; it's almost guaranteeing the survival of it" (Adler 2012).

From the perspective of a live music genre, this study has investigated the geography of nearly 20,000 performances over the past 15 years. In addition to the

areas where smooth jazz radio was successful, it was shown that there is also significant listenership in the larger cities in the Great Lakes region, as well as in Las Vegas, Phoenix, Atlanta, and cities of the Texas Triangle. Looking abroad, roughly 15% of smooth jazz concerts are performed internationally, most notably in Tokyo and London, as well as in Germany, Italy, Canada, and more recently at sea on themed cruises.

In addition to addressing the most popular locations of live performances, this study also considered the geography of performance space, identifying categories of concert settings, including jazz-and-supper clubs, small performing arts centers, hotel amphitheaters, casinos, vineyards, and the prominent draw of water, whether performed on a ship or situated seaside.

While this study focused on the geography of terrestrial radio broadcasting and locations of live performances as two proxies to better understand the geography of smooth jazz listener consumption, there are additional avenues that could prove useful for future study if the data could be acquired from proprietary sources. Given that there has been a shift away from traditional FM radio to other broadcast sources, such as satellite / HD radio and online stations, the geography of the latter could be investigated if IP addresses of the Internet streams could be obtained. Also, it would be interesting to inquire with the cruise lines to see if there is a notable difference in the home residences of passengers embarking on smooth jazz cruises versus passengers of cruises having the same itineraries.

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## CHAPTER III

### SENSE OF PLACE IN THE MUSICAL LANDSCAPES OF SMOOTH JAZZ

#### **Abstract**

*Contemporary / smooth jazz has been a commercially viable radio format and musical subgenre since the late 1980s. Although this music is mostly instrumental, smooth jazz is highly programmatic, and the song titles suggest a strong sense of place. This article explores how landscapes have served as an inspiration to smooth jazz artists, and how musicians have portrayed aspects of place through a variety of musical elements, such as instrumentation, melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, tempo, tonality, texture, and aesthetics. This study seeks to demonstrate that music geographers can better understand place by examining more than just song texts (i.e., titles and lyrics) in their studies. In this paper, several themes of smooth jazz soundscapes are identified and presented, involving aspects of water, weather, urbanity, time, and travel. The relationship between smooth jazz and mental maps will be discussed, both in terms of place preference and stereotypes. From a cultural standpoint, this article explores what smooth jazz has to say about a desired lifestyle, as well as how this commercially-successful music sometimes straddles the line between cultural appreciation and cultural*

*appropriation through its ability to offer its listeners virtual musical tourism to the exotic.*

## **Introduction**

Over the past twenty-five years, the musical subgenre of “smooth jazz” has enjoyed much commercial success. This form of music grew out of a radio format born in the late 1980s that, at its peak, broadcast on approximately 160 radio stations in the United States (Washburne 2004, 133).

In classical music, one may be familiar with the terms *absolute* and *programmatic* when it comes to classifying the intent of the music. Hungarian composer Franz Liszt is often credited with coining the term *programme* music, and *Grove Music Online* defines programmatic music as being “music of a narrative or descriptive kind...that attempts to represent extra-musical concepts without resort to sung words” (Scruton 2014). Whereas *absolute* music is instrumental music that only bears titles having to do with musical parameters like tempo, key, form, or genre, *programmatic* music often attempts to paint a story or feeling. Works like *Symphony No. 19 in E-flat Major* (Mozart) or *Piano Trio No. 2 in D minor, Op. 66* (Mendelssohn) are clear examples of absolute music since they can be considered music for the sake of music, not attempting to illustrate nonmusical ideas. Programmatic music, on the other hand, could include Handel’s *Water Music*, Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*, and Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at An Exhibition*.

In *Sounds of Place*, ethnomusicologist Denise Von Glahn analyzed how the American landscape has been interpreted and set to music by classical composers. Her premise was “that places can inspire art, and that musical responses can, at some level, evoke those places” (Von Glahn 2003, 2). She argues that when a composer musically commemorates a place in the title of a piece, it “is part of the composer’s work and the listener’s experience” and that the association encouraged by the composer “may vary from documentary-like correspondences of place and sound to the most impressionistic of relationships” (2).

Even though the majority of smooth jazz is instrumental, this music is highly programmatic in nature. Smooth jazz song titles often carry place names, of both generic and specific locales. A listener can take a toponym in a song title and use it as a means to focus one’s listening on how an artist decided to musically portray a place, and as a jumping off point to dive into how various musical parameters have been employed to illustrate place.

### **Musical Parameters**

Many basic textbooks for music appreciation and music theory classes reference various sets of musical elements, aspects, or parameters, which are characteristics of music. Seeing that there is not really a standardized set of musical parameters in the literature, after consulting several sources (Hickok 1975; Hoffer 1988; Kennedy, Johnson, and Kennedy 2012; White 1976), I have decided to identify and describe

several parameters that I believe can provide music geographers with an extended repertoire of ways to approach musical analysis:

- **Text** – Song titles, lyrics, written instructions in the score, composer narrative, liner notes
- **Pitch** – Perception of frequency, typically perceived as “low” or “high”
- **Melody** – A series of notes heard as some sort of unit
- **Harmony** – Relationship between pitches sounding simultaneously
- **Tempo** – Speed at which a piece of music moves, measurable in beats per minute (BPM)
- **Rhythm** – The temporal pattern of duration and stress
- **Timbre** – The quality of a sound, including tone color, articulation, and/or playing technique
- **Dynamics** – Volume of a sound or note
- **Tonality / Key** – Organization of music around a central pitch and scale
- **Instrumentation** – Arrangement of music for particular musical instruments and/or voice
- **Texture** – The sound fabric produced by the interaction of musical lines
- **Aesthetics** – How the music affects you emotionally

### **Methodology and Research Questions**

Given that, when considered as a musical subgenre, smooth jazz is a crossover category, it was necessary to come up with a definitive classification of which artists and groups would be included and excluded from this study. One of the largest online music databases is Rovi Corporation’s All Music Guide, which evolved from a series of reference books, first published in 1992 (Erlewine 1992). The database includes metadata about artists, albums, and tracks, and Rovi maintains a staff of editors to

review music and classify content. The All Music Guide has a genre category of Smooth Jazz, defined as:

*Smooth Jazz is an outgrowth of fusion, one that emphasizes its polished side. Generally, smooth jazz relies on rhythms and grooves instead of improvisation. There are layers of synthesizers, lite-funk rhythms, lite-funk bass, elastic guitars, and either trumpets, alto, or soprano saxophones. The music isn't cerebral, like hard bop, nor is it gritty and funky like soul-jazz or groove -- it is unobtrusive, slick, and highly polished, where the overall sound matters more than the individual parts (Rovi 2013).*

Using Rovi's application programming interface (API), biographical information and discographies were retrieved for 203 smooth jazz artists and groups, which included complete metadata on studio albums and song titles. Song titles were then analyzed for specific and generalized place references, which were categorized into major themes. At that point, songs with place references were listened to in order to explore the musical depiction of landscape. A discography is provided at the end of this paper to reference albums containing the songs discussed herein.

This paper seeks to address several questions:

- Which places provide inspiration for musical depiction in smooth jazz?
- How do musicians portray and communicate places through various musical parameters?
- When multiple musicians represent a place in multiple songs, what similarities and differences exist that the listener can identify, and why might this be?
- What does smooth jazz reveal about the lifestyle of its listeners and cultural geography?
- How might listening to smooth jazz create, shape, and/or reinforce people's place perceptions and/or stereotypes?

## Listen Carefully

Von Glahn (2003, 3) suggests “Where painters remember a landscape for its light and shade, the ways in which colors and shapes animate images, composers hear the rhythms and timbres of a place and recall it in sound.” When musicians are inspired to depict a landscape in song, they might either take an abstraction of the panorama or focus on a select few specific details to depict in their compositions. What inspiration a composer might have experienced originally through one or more senses is then turned into a musical work that will ultimately be shared and experienced via the single sense of sound. Compositional style and a composer’s sense of place will shape how a landscape is encoded in a musical work, and then a listener’s own sense of place and musical preference will result in how that individual receives and interprets the composer’s intent. Knight (2006, 209) reminds us “Geographers and composers may consider the same phenomena, yet their languages are so different that it may take some time and special effort before they are able to communicate.”

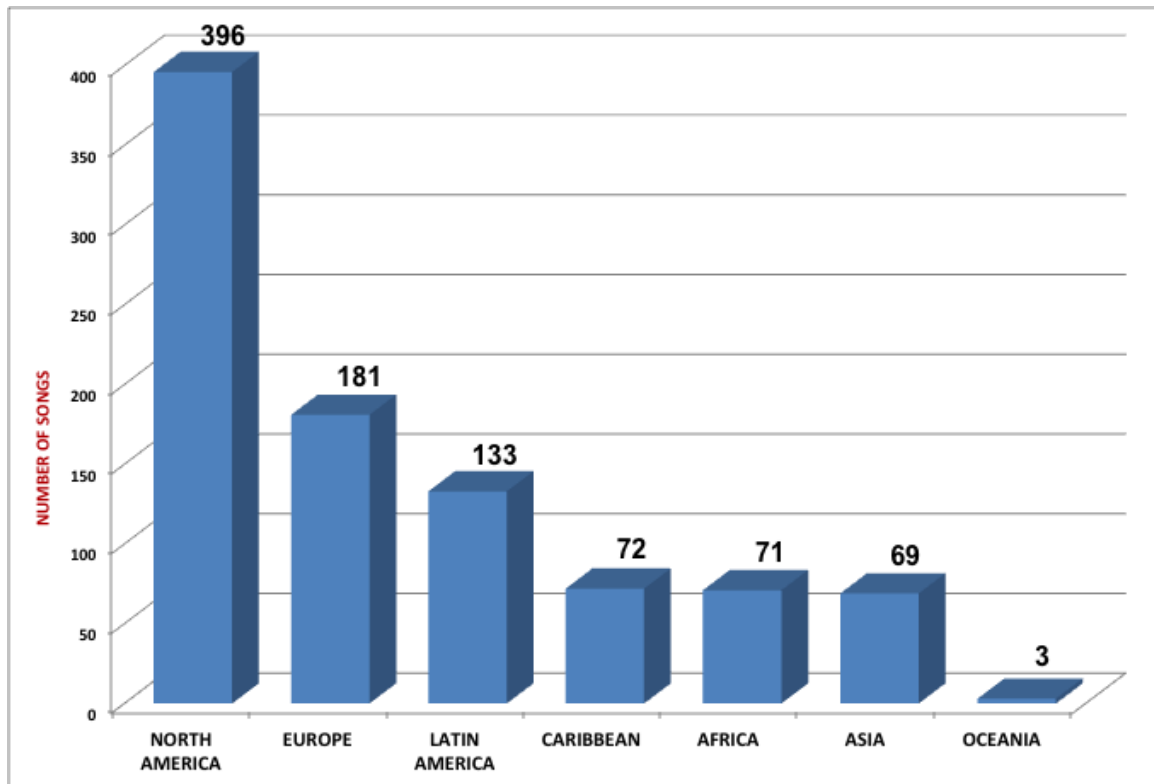
Knight (2006, 78-79) recounts a humorous story that carries a serious warning when he tells about how composer Robert Schumann was mistakenly under the impression that his friend Felix Mendelssohn’s *“Scottish” Symphony No. 3* was actually an “Italian” symphony. Schumann supposedly went on and on about the Italian-ness of the work, praising its “beautiful Italian pictures, so beautiful as to compensate a hearer who had never been to Italy.” Sure, one can read too much into the music and easily arrive at spurious conclusions. When I first heard smooth jazz pianist Keiko Matsui’s “A Night With Cha Cha,” I will confess that I was originally listening carefully for Cuban

dance rhythms, until I came across an interview where Matsui explained she was commemorating a great trip she had made to the Caucasus, during which she first tried the Georgian brandy Chacha (Martin 2013).

Admittedly, there is quite a bit of speculation that goes into reading musical landscapes, especially in the case of an instrumental music like smooth jazz, where one has to typically operate only off of a title. Sometimes, liner notes and interviews can shed some light in an effort to go behind the music. Some references to place are obscure, ambiguous, or even imagined. It is also important to note that even when taken separately, no two people are going to experience music or landscapes the same way. In the same way that landscapes will be “seen” differently, music will be “heard” differently from person to person. Music is a means of expression and it is personal to composer and listener alike. Preferences for place and sound also introduce bias. However, there are still many obvious examples of tone painting that are communicated universally, and these are a primary focus of this analysis.

## **Mental Maps**

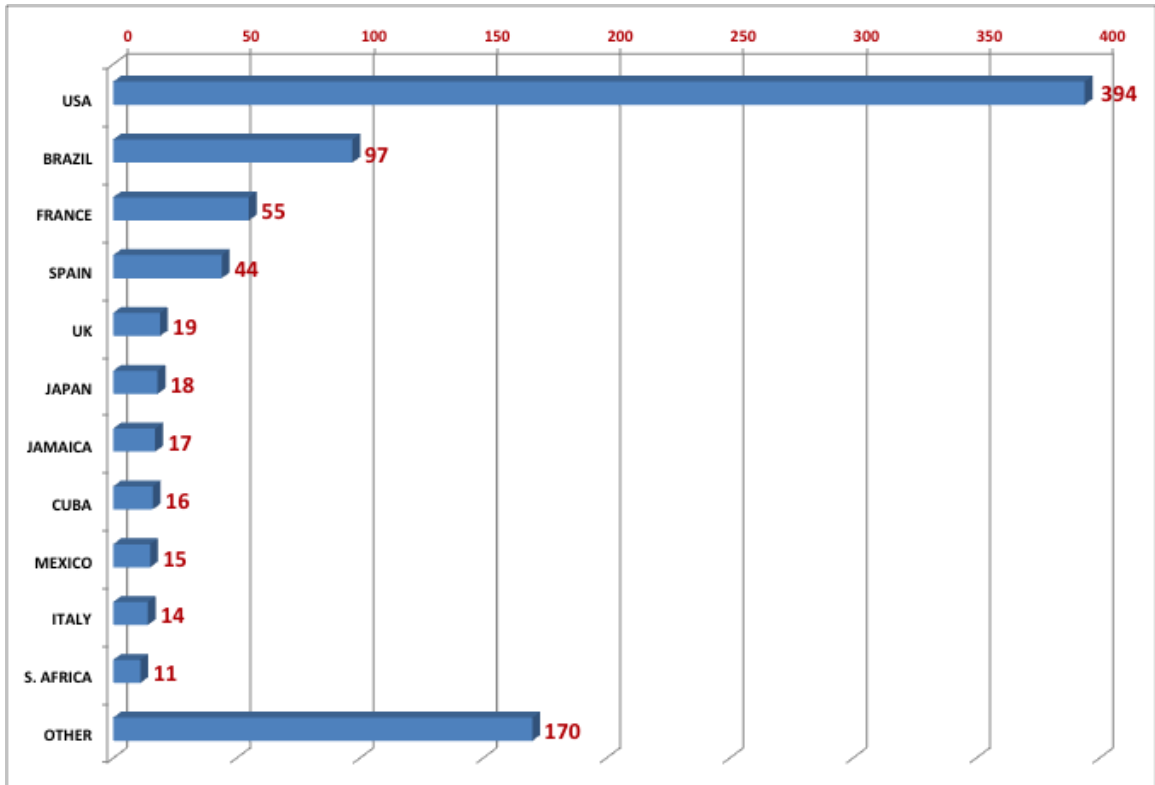
After combing through a list of 21,795 unique recorded smooth jazz song titles and identifying as many specific toponyms as possible, it turned out that 870 of these songs (4.0%) were titled after specific places (i.e., “Cape Town Love,” “Latin Quarter,” “Lights Out San Francisco,” etc.). Regionally speaking, of this set (see Figure 3.1), 396 songs (46%) portrayed places in North America, followed by 181 songs referencing Europe, and another 133 paying homage to places in Latin America.



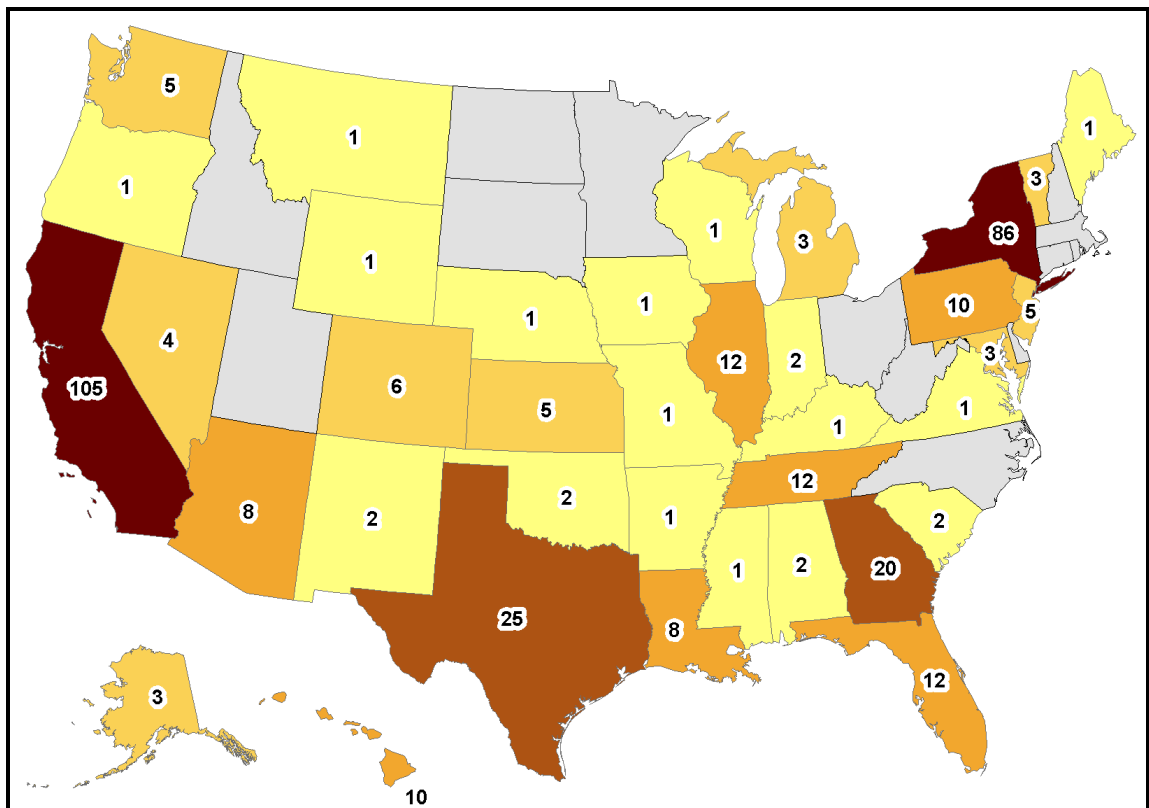
**Figure 3.1:** Smooth jazz song titles portraying specific places, by region.

Drilling down to the national scale (Figure 3.2), an incredible total of 78 different countries have served as sources of inspiration for smooth jazz songs, with the most popular including the United States (394 songs), Brazil (97), France (55), and Spain (44). Within the United States (Figure 3.3), musicians have managed as of 2014 to find some aspect of 37 different states to portray in song, but California (105 songs) and New York (86) have definitively made the most significant impressions.





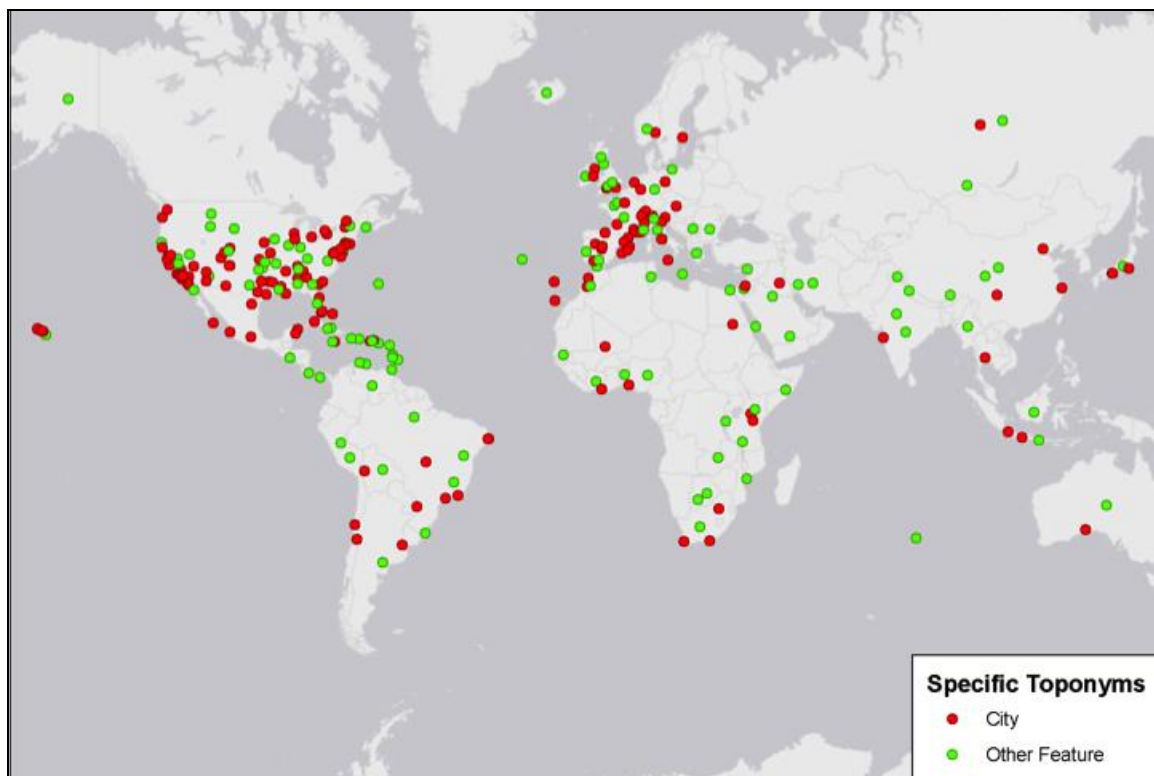
*Figure 3.2: Smooth jazz song titles portraying specific places, by country.*



*Figure 3.3: Smooth jazz song titles portraying specific places, by state.*

Mental maps are internalized representations of what people know about, and how they perceive, the world around them. According to the National Geographic Society's standards for geographic education, mental maps incorporate "a mix of objective knowledge and subjective perceptions," contain "location of geographic features as well as impressions of places," and are constantly being shaped by personal experience and through media (National Geographic 2014). Smooth jazz musicians have been inspired to compose songs about places that have significance within their own mental maps, such as where these musicians have lived, traveled, performed, or might simply be curious about. The collective mental maps of these musicians have produced a musical gazetteer of places for smooth jazz listeners to discover and have their personal mental maps expanded, challenged, and potentially redrawn through the medium of music.

By spatially plotting the specific places depicted in the titles of the complete smooth jazz repertoire, a map (Figure 3.4) could be constructed for smooth jazz to show which places have been in the consciousness of composers, performers, and listeners. The points in red represent cities or places within cities, such as specific streets, bridges, restaurants, concert venues, etc., while the points in green represent locations of specific physical features or centroids of large areas, such as countries and oceans. This map illustrates that, while smooth jazz artists, who are overwhelmingly American, create a lot of music depicting domestic places, there is also a repertoire that suggests these artists are thinking globally, or at least regionally (i.e., Europe, Caribbean, and Latin America), in order to provide their listeners with their take on the world.



**Figure 3.4:** *Global distribution of specific places found in smooth jazz song titles.*

### Smooth Jazz on Identity and Place

Several smooth jazz groups are so rooted in place that their band names are derived from their surroundings. Hiroshima is a Los Angeles based Asian-American fusion group that has been active since the 1970s, specializing in the fusion of jazz with Japanese instruments, most notably the koto, played by June Kuramoto, the only Japanese-born member of the group. The L.A. Chillharmonic (a play on the L.A. Philharmonic) is a side project of smooth jazz all-stars led by Richard Smith, a jazz guitarist who teaches at the University of Southern California. Four80East is a Toronto-based ensemble that took its name from the address of its original recording studio—480 Richmond Street East (Last.FM 2014). Finally, the most bizarre story behind a

smooth jazz group's name has to be Fattburger, which took its name from a local San Diego mom-and-pop restaurant called Fatburger, a popular hangout for the group's members. The restaurant eventually went on to become a corporate chain, and the band had to add another letter to its name in order to avoid a lawsuit (Krueger 2011).

In addition to group names carrying place references, smooth jazz artists also reflect on their roots and nationalism directly as it pertains to their music. Jonathan Butler, an acclaimed contemporary jazz guitarist from South Africa, was the first black artist to receive airplay on white radio stations in his home country (Johnson 1997). His song "Mandela Bay," named after a South African municipality honoring Nelson Mandela, features melodic guitar lines simulating call-and-response singing, upbeat syncopated rhythms, and background vocals suggesting African chants. On "Cruisin' J Town," Hiroshima fuses pentatonic melodic flourishes played on a koto and high-energy taiko drumming with more Western keyboards and sax solos. Group member Dan Kuramoto explains that "J-Town refers to Japan Town USA, it's a microcosm of all the multi-cultural communities that make America the most diverse country in the world, and how better to reflect that than in music?" (Hiroshima 2013). Other artists who have commemorated their roots include saxophonist Aaron Bing, who recorded "Dominica" in honor of his Dominican heritage, French guitarist Marc Antoine, who has recorded several songs about Paris, and trumpeter Chris Botti, commemorated his Italian heritage and several childhood years living abroad with the album *Italia*.

## Same Place, Different Treatment

Looking at the titles of songs in the smooth jazz repertoire, it is readily apparent that particular places, whether specific or general, have served as sources of compositional inspiration. It is fascinating to see the similarities and differences that emerge from how multiple musicians depict the same landscape. Knight explains (2006, vii):

*What we 'see' in a landscape may or may not be seen by others, so we must be aware of contrasting perceptions of the same landscape and of the cultural framework within which people perceive and use the landscape. We can ask, would two composers 'compose' the same scene in an identical manner? As will be seen, no! As each composer seeks to put into music his or her perception of a particular landscape, his or her musical style is used to express a representation of that landscape. In that sense, each composition is unique.*

In 1987, Art Good, smooth jazz radio DJ and host of the syndicated JazzTrax radio program, started a festival at the Avalon Casino Ballroom on Santa Catalina Island, which is situated twenty-six miles off the coast of southern California. This long-running jazz festival turns Catalina into a smooth jazz headquarters for two to three weekends every October, featuring dozens of concerts enjoyed by thousands of people.

Catalina Island had already been immortalized in the jazz standard "Avalon," written by Al Jolson, Buddy DeSylva, and Vincent Rose back in 1920, which has received renditions over the years from Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, and Natalie Cole. The song is about memories of a past love, with lyrics "I found my love in Avalon beside the bay / I left my love in Avalon and sailed away / I dream of her and Avalon, from dusk till

dawn / And so I think I'll travel on to Avalon" (JazzStandards.com 2014). Joe Sample recorded his own piano rendition of "Avalon" on the album *Soul Shadows*.

Other contemporary jazz musicians have commemorated their experiences at the Catalina JazzTrax Festival with original songs, as evidenced by Acoustic Alchemy's "Catalina Kiss," Brian Tarquin's "Catalina Breeze," Jeff Kashiwa's "Remember Catalina," The Rippingtons' "Avalon," and two original songs by Gregg Karukas ("Avalon" and "Catalina Wind").

In "Catalina Kiss," the British group Acoustic Alchemy employs a 6/8 time signature, which seems to evoke the rocking back and forth of the ferry that transports performers and fans from the port of Long Beach to Avalon. Brian Tarquin's "Catalina Breeze" is a laid-back number for guitar and sax that is colored throughout by the use of a mark tree, also known as bar chimes, a percussion instrument that Gregg Karukas also uses on "Catalina Wind" to evoke the light ocean breeze. Saxophonist Jeff Kashiwa's reading of the island landscape is quite different from his peers, as he wails over an upbeat tropical texture that features vibraphone and marimba in "Remember Catalina." On "Avalon," Eric Marienthal plays an emotional sax melody for this ballad by The Rippingtons that has the feel of a perfect closing number for a concert set, so much so that you expect to hear, "Thank you, Avalon, good night" at the end of the tune.

### **Smooth Jazz Soundscapes**

In the book *Landscapes In Music*, David Knight (2006) identified major themes of soundscapes in orchestral music, and organized his discussion by devoting chapters to

topics including waterscapes, specific and generalized landscapes, imagined and mythic landscapes, and landscapes of extremes. Following a similar approach, the major themes of smooth jazz will be identified and examined.

### *Waterscapes*

When considering both specific and generic place references, water emerged as a popular inspiration, as 803 songs (3.7% of all smooth jazz songs) contained one or more references to water. Song titles depicting waterscapes utilized 136 different words to indicate water, with the most popular choices being “rain” (128 songs), “river” (58), “island” (50), “water” (42), “rainbow”, and “coast” (37). Some notable songs include “Harbor Lights” by Chuck Loeb, “Venice Beach” by Peter White, and “Ocean Blue” by Steve Oliver.

Waterscapes are evoked by Sirius XM’s satellite radio station for smooth jazz, which bears the name Watercolors. I have listened to this station for more than a decade, and remember when the programming times were given for “Ocean West” and “Ocean East” instead of Pacific and Eastern time zones. Watercolors prefers the “contemporary jazz” title, but the DJs and jingles often use the shortened “c-jazz” title, which, when pronounced, also evokes waterscapes (sea jazz). The station advertises “a sophisticated musical landscape that’s smooth and cool” and describes the music it plays as “sonic art,” commodifying the music as upper class. In terms of terrestrial radio, several stations that specialized in the smooth jazz format carried nicknames evoking waterscapes, including “The Wave” (KTWV 94.7 FM Los Angeles), “The Oasis”

(KOAI 107.5 FM Dallas), “The Bridge” (KKXS 96.1 FM Redding, CA), and “Seabreeze FM” (106.3 FM Destin, FL).

### *Weatherscapes*

Another theme found in smooth jazz is a connection with weather. There were 530 songs (2.4% of all smooth jazz songs) that contained one or more references to weather. A total of 85 unique words were used to evoke meteorological forces, including “rain,” “wind,” “rainbow,” “breeze,” and “storm.” Popular songs from this theme include “After the Rain” by Boney James, “After the Storm” by Norman Brown, and the sultry “107 Degrees In the Shade” (not to mention the sequel “108 Degrees” that was released twelve years later) by Alex Bugnon.

The connection between smooth jazz and weather is not at all surprising, considering that for decades, this music was ubiquitous as the soundtrack behind the Weather Channel’s Local-On-the-8s forecasts, thanks to former producer Steve Hurst, who promoted smooth jazz as the predominant instrumental music one would hear when watching animated radar maps and trying to get the upcoming week’s forecast. Hurst’s goal was to find “music that may appeal to a wide audience without turning off sophisticated listeners” (Klinkenberg 2003). The Weather Channel has since released two CD anthologies of smooth jazz songs featured on-air during forecasts.

On the geographically titled album *Hemispheres*, keyboardist Dan Siegel incorporates the exotic sound of a pan flute into the tune “El Niño,” which points the listener toward Peru. Guitarists often use a musical technique known as an arpeggio,



which is where the notes of a chord are played individually, one after another, rather than being sounded simultaneously. Jesse Cook captures the indoor feel of a “Rain Day” by employing a gloomy minor key and playing slow arpeggios where the notes of the broken chords sound like raindrops. In contrast, Lawson Rollins offers up two minutes of high-velocity nylon string shredding and rapid arpeggios on “Santa Ana Wind,” which illustrates the intensity behind Southern California’s dry downslope winds that often whip up fires.

### *Streetscapes*

Smooth jazz demonstrates an affinity for streets, with 366 songs (1.7% of all smooth jazz songs) containing references to specific streets or road themes. This group tends to have a collectively faster tempo than other songs. Themes often deal with intersections, highway driving, and metaphorical roads. Notable songs include “Hollywood and Vine” by trumpeter Rick Braun, “Street Beat” by Richard Elliot, and “Shelter Island Drive” by Acoustic Alchemy (honoring the location of popular concert venue Humphrey’s By the Bay in San Diego).

Keyboardist Brian Culbertson of Decatur, Illinois composed “Fullerton Avenue” as a tribute to the street where he resided while studying music at DePaul University, and the music video shows the sights of this Chicago thoroughfare interspersed with footage of Culbertson and colleagues in the recording studio.

People spend a lot of time in their cars, and the concept of driving has figured a lot into smooth jazz. Peppy music for commuters includes “War of the S.U.V.’s” by

David Benoit, featuring a trumpet with a timbre that could symbolize car horns, and “L.A., Land of the Barking Car” by Brian Bromberg, while saxophonist Paul Taylor utilized his initials for a pun on “PT Cruiser,” a novelty vehicle. Saxophonist Gerald Albright dedicated “Highway 70” to Denver, stating that this is “one of those tunes where you pop your convertible top back, turn it up real loud, and go on up the mountain” (Albright 2011).

California State Route 1, also known as Pacific Coast Highway, has been a favorite subject of smooth jazz musicians, receiving musical settings from Marc Antoine (“P.C.H.”), Richard Elliot (“Highway 1”), Jeff Lorber (“Pacific Coast Highway”), Nils (“Pacific Coast Highway”), Steve Oliver (“Highway One”), Doc Powell (“Pacific Coast Drive”), and Bryan Savage (“Pacific Coast Highway”). The scenic coastal highway spans more than 600 miles between Mendocino and Orange Counties, passing through many small towns as well as San Francisco and Greater Los Angeles. Given the length of this route and the diversity of landscapes it traverses, one would expect to hear similarities and differences in musical treatments. Of the seven compositions listed above, five are in major keys, and all but one song have a tempo exceeding 95 BPM. Powell and Savage’s songs have thin textures featuring flute melodies throughout, conjuring up the shimmer of the Pacific Ocean. Antoine’s song is the most percussion-laden, resulting in the most urban-sounding groove in the group, and might be portraying one of the larger cities along the route, whereas Elliot’s breezy sax number is in 6/8 meter at 114 BPM, suggesting an open stretch of road in Central California. The music video for Nils’ “Pacific Coast Highway” begins with footage of dolphins and waves before showing the

guitarist driving a Mercedes convertible along the route, on his way to a mansion on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Upon arrival, Nils dips his feet in a large swimming pool, enjoys a glass of red wine, and takes in the scenery until his band mates join him to play the rest of the song. The video could almost be received as an inadvertent parody of the genre, as waterscapes, luxury cars, affluence, and wine all embody the stereotype of the smooth jazz lifestyle.

### *Placed in Time*

Nearly one out of ten smooth jazz songs surveyed had something to do with time, which fell into two categories—seasonal and diurnal. In terms of seasons, jazz artists' preference for portraying summer (113 songs) was overwhelming compared with spring (32), autumn (25), and winter (17). Songs of the seasons include Euge Groove's "Summer Stroll," Jeff Kashiwa's "Autumn Ride," Earl Klugh's "Winter Rain," and Chuck Mangione's "Spring Fever."

When considering the diurnal nature of place, 381 songs (1.7%) reference daytime, with a great deal of emphasis placed on the morning, in particularly with dawn. Jay Beckenstein's "Sunrise" begins with an ascending melodic motif played on an acoustic guitar to communicate the sun coming up through a literal rise in pitch (see Figure 3.5). The texture is light at first, with just the guitar and soft high-hat, but more layers are added gradually, including sax and keyboard, to figuratively get the day started. It is several minutes before a contrasting section of dissonant chromaticism emerges. Back in 1979, Beckenstein's band Spyro Gyra topped the Billboard Adult

Contemporary chart with “Morning Dance,” which receives its sunny timbre from steel pan and warmth from marimba rolls, with a lot of bounce coming from Beckenstein’s highly syncopated and wide-interval melody on alto sax.



**Figure 3.5:** Music notation for opening melody of “Sunrise” by Jay Beckenstein.

Smooth jazz musicians have devoted even more attention to nighttime, as 551 songs (2.5%) bear titles evoking periods of darkness. 3rd Force’s ballad “Here Comes the Night” features a thin texture, with long-duration harmonies sustained in synthesizer and accordion, and further paints the onset of evening by sampling insect sounds. Here, the melodic contour trends in the other direction, as guest artist Peter White’s acoustic guitar descends in pitch at the cadences, and is interspersed with downward glissandos from the synthesizer.

A total of 63 songs contain “midnight” in the title. Chris Botti (2001), in the liner notes to his album *Night Sessions*, explains that “We sensed freedom after dark – the phone was quieter and there were less distractions around the house as the light of the L.A. basin began to glow. We recorded only after the sun had set, often until it rose the next morning.” The use of the trumpet mute on several of these songs supports the nighttime feel and evokes distance. David Benoit’s “Freedom at Midnight” and Tommy Emmanuel’s “Midnight Drive” serve as additional evidence that smooth jazz musicians enjoy the late night hours, when there are fewer distractions and their performances

are complete. Smooth jazz may be the music of night owls, as shown by Tom Braxton's "1 A.M.," Boney James' "2:01 AM," and Najee, Michael Lington, and Bob James have all composed original songs titled "3 A.M." Listeners in search of some sensual and seductive music will find what they are looking for in many of the single-digit A.M. tunes that feature sax.

### *On Travels To and From Home*

Relative location and distance figure into 816 smooth jazz songs (3.7% of all songs). In these songs, roughly five times the songs have to do with people and places that are far rather than near. There are also more than twice as many songs that look "high" instead of "low" and "up" rather than "down," which represent aspects of altitude, relative direction, and/or mood (where "getting down" can actually be a positive). In terms of the cardinal directions, there is a balance among "east," "west," and "south," but very few songs portraying places to the "north."

The Rippingtons' "Tourist In Paradise" embodies the spirit of what Connell and Gibson (2003, 89) have to say about the ability of music to enable its listeners to enjoy a sense of escape. "Music briefly allows escape, an escape that is necessarily virtual, primarily through transient and vicarious participation in particular musical experiences—whether concerts, recordings or videos—where, briefly, individuals and audiences are transported into the music and out of the mundane." Smooth jazz listeners can be virtually transported to exotic destinations by Hiroshima to "Lanai," by Acoustic Alchemy to "Marrakesh," and join Fourplay on a "Bali Run."

Getting back to one's home is a prominent theme, such as Everette Harp's "Coming Home," Steve Cole's "Take Me Home To You," and Kenny G's "Homeland." The Pat Metheny Group's "Last Train Home" rivals the fiddle tune "Orange Blossom Special" in its ability to evoke the railroad. The persistent sixteenth notes played with brushes on the snare drum emulate the rhythm of the train, a light texture of keyboard, synthesizer, and a vocalise (vocal melody without words) section provide a warm timbre and aesthetic comfort for both the journey and destination ahead. Metheny contributes an introspective melody played on an electric sitar, which produces a bright and twangy quality, and he even emulates the intervals one might hear at a grade crossing. The "home" in this song could likely be Metheny's own, as he was born and raised in Lee's Summit, Missouri, a town named for having the highest elevation along the Missouri Pacific Railroad between St. Louis and Kansas City.

### *Urban Geography*

When it comes to sounding out the city, smooth jazz musicians have had several metropolises in mind for their compositions (see Table 3.1). New York has received the most treatments, being the focus of 71 songs, followed domestically by Los Angeles (25), Chicago (10), and Philadelphia (10). Internationally, Paris (35) and Rio de Janeiro (29) have received the most attention.

**DOMESTIC CITIES**

| <b>RANK</b> | <b>CITY</b>          | <b>SONGS</b> |
|-------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 1           | <i>New York</i>      | 71           |
| 2           | <i>Los Angeles</i>   | 25           |
| 3           | <i>Chicago</i>       | 11           |
| 4           | <i>Philadelphia</i>  | 10           |
| 5.5         | <i>Memphis</i>       | 8            |
| 5.5         | <i>Miami</i>         | 8            |
| 8.5         | <i>Avalon, CA</i>    | 6            |
| 8.5         | <i>New Orleans</i>   | 6            |
| 8.5         | <i>San Francisco</i> | 6            |
| 8.5         | <i>San Juan</i>      | 6            |

**INTERNATIONAL CITIES**

| <b>RANK</b> | <b>CITY</b>           | <b>SONGS</b> |
|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 1           | <i>Paris</i>          | 35           |
| 2           | <i>Rio de Janeiro</i> | 29           |
| 3           | <i>Madrid</i>         | 8            |
| 4.5         | <i>Havana</i>         | 7            |
| 4.5         | <i>Tokyo</i>          | 7            |
| 7           | <i>Cape Town</i>      | 6            |
| 7           | <i>Kobe</i>           | 6            |
| 7           | <i>London</i>         | 6            |
| 9           | <i>Cabo San Lucas</i> | 5            |

**Table 3.1:** *Frequency of cities depicted in smooth jazz song titles.*

Place-specific compositions are the product of the landscape of interest, one's experience there, and what Knight (2006, 23) refers to as a composer's autograph. He says that by "using particular combinations of instrumentation, tones, colors, rhythms, and tempos, they create sounds that 'belong' to them." Earlier, in the Pacific Coast Highway examples, it was shown that even though there was some common ground among the selections, some of the musicians had some very different interpretations, likely because the road spans more than 600 miles. When it comes to the scale of a major urban center, it becomes even more difficult for the composer and listener to negotiate place through music because of the necessary abstraction. Thus, it is better to approach cityscapes through listening for the overall vibe and feel, and, sometimes, musical stereotypes.

As of 2012, France was the country with, by far and away, the most international tourist arrivals worldwide, estimated at 83 million people, well outpacing the United States, which ranked second with 66.7 million (UNWTO 2014, 6). There are even more people who can only dream of one day making a trip to France, and smooth jazz aims to appeal to those interested in “hearing” France and its primate city, Paris. In terms of place references, France ranked third among countries and Paris ranked second in cities, only behind New York. It is difficult to find a smooth jazz song about Paris without hearing an accordion, the instrument that evokes the popular musette style of French cafes. It is one thing to hear an accordion in works by Americans, such as Craig Sharmat’s “A Day In Paris” and The Rippingtons’ “Paris Groove,” but it even appears a few times in French guitarist Marc Antoine’s collaboration with American Paul Brown on “Bridges of Paris,” a song that surprisingly goes along for the ride with this stereotype of Parisian music, as the listener virtually strolls down the Seine.

Brazil has had the most smooth jazz portrayals of any country outside the U.S., and its cities, most notably Rio, but also Sao Paulo and Brasilia have been set to music. One thing that is striking is that, according to the concert database Pollstar, only 9 smooth jazz performances have taken place in Brazil since 1999, ranking 36th among countries. It is arguably the legacy of Jobim, the rhythms of bossa nova and samba, and the spirit of Carnival that smooth jazz musicians seek to incorporate into their music. Notable songs evoking urban Brazil include David Benoit’s “Café Rio,” Craig Chaquico’s “Café Carnival,” and R&R’s “Sao Paulo.”



Smooth jazz depicting New York City has showed the most affinity for Manhattan, with many references to Midtown, Central Park, Harlem, and Soho. Several songs seek to depict the Big Apple late at night, when it is at its calmest. “Washington Bridge” by Boney James and “Hudson River Nights” by Kim Waters geographically flank Grover Washington, Jr. and Peter White’s “Midnight in Manhattan,” and all three songs feature laid-back saxophone melodies juxtaposed with drum programming heavy on the backbeats to produce a complementary urban groove. Other artists have preferred to reference the energy of urban density, including Soul Ballet’s use of snappy chromatic ornamentation in the melody on “New York Trippin’” and Down to the Bone’s incorporation of funk in “Staten Island Groove.”

Back in Los Angeles, Candy Dulfer’s sax rides atop a texture of old-school soul full of strut on “L.A. City Lights.” A common source of inspiration for L.A. songs seems to be getting around the city, not only as shown earlier with Bromberg’s barking cars, but also in Rick Braun’s “Central Avenue,” Bryan Savage’s “Mulholland Drive,” Lee Ritenour’s “L.A. by Bike,” Tom Scott’s “Hollywood Walk,” and Four80East’s “Last Flight to L.A.”

When one has had their fill of the big city lights, the smooth jazz map is dotted with many vacation destinations, hitting the resort towns like a timeshare directory, with examples including the Rippingtons’ “Aspen” and “Sedona,” Fattburger’s “Coronado,” and pun-filled “Palm Strings” from Marc Antoine and “Santa Café” from Acoustic Alchemy.

It is probably true that musicians, regardless of genre, play the geography card from time to time. By working a place name into a song title or lyrics, it creates not only

a lasting linkage with the music, but it can also have an effect on how the music is received by the listener. While most artists are genuine regarding the inclusion of place, one must also consider commercial success. There are large numbers of people residing in, or have a connection to, cities like New York or Los Angeles, or may have a curiosity about Rio, Paris, or London, and could make a purchase based on the exploitation of place.

Several smooth jazz musicians have dedicated songs to their hometowns, such as Canadian saxophonist Warren Hill's "Toronto," Jeff Lorber's "Philly Style," Chicago guitarist Nick Colionne's "The Big Windy Cat," and Tulsa-raised bassist Wayman Tisdale's "Washington High" (Booker T. Washington High School).

### *Smooth Jazz on Culture*

Given that the smooth jazz genre was originally conceived as a radio format, one must consider the primary purpose of commercial broadcasting, which is to air advertisements for profit. In order to better understand the cultural aspects of this music, it is worth exploring the target demographic that this music attempts to reach. In promotional materials, WSBZ 106.3 FM "Seabreeze FM" out of Destin / Fort Walton Beach, Florida promotes that "smooth jazz is a lifestyle that appeals to a sophisticated audience that enjoys the finer things in life" and "is the listener group with the most discretionary income. Our listener is 30 to 54 years old (median age of 41), professional, college-educated, and earning \$75,000+ per year" (Seabreeze FM 2014). Palm Springs smooth jazz station KJJZ 102.3 FM "K-Jazz" portrays its listener base as affluent couples

who own their homes, have a lot of disposable income, have much leisure time, and are more likely to play golf and buy expensive cars and jewelry (Marker Broadcasting 2005).

Scarborough Research often revealed in *Radio and Records* rating directories that smooth jazz listeners were much more likely to own and use a computer than listeners of other radio formats. A good deal of smooth jazz has been inspired by technology. George Benson conveyed what it is like to be “Living In High Definition.” The evolution of technology has been echoed in smooth jazz titles, such as Kirk Whalum’s “Floppy Disk” (1985), Fattburger’s “Nice Bits” and “Groove Y2K” (2000), Chuck Loeb’s “eBop” (2003), and Jeff Lorber’s “Gigabyte” (2003). Several artists decided to advertise their recently launched Web sites by turning them into album names, including *Fattburger.com* and *BobBaldwin.com*. With the ubiquity of texting in today’s society, Chris Standring decided to title one of his songs after the top row of the keyboard, “Qwertyuiop.” These and other tech-inspired songs tend to feature a hefty load of synthesizer and electric wind instrument (EWI) to pursue new sounds, and are usually up-tempo with virtuosic passages, where perhaps the quantity of pitches mimics increased bandwidth.

As this music is enjoyed by an older demographic, it is not surprising that alcoholic consumption figures into the titling of song. The marriage of wine and jazz has been evidenced by vineyard concert series and SmoothJazz.com’s long-running mail-order Wine and Jazz Sampler Club. The two adult beverages most often set to song are wine and martinis, as evidenced by Grover Washington, Jr.’s “Winelight,” Marc Antoine’s “Wine Night,” Kenny G’s “Champagne,” many different covers and

arrangements of “Cold Duck,” Brian Bromberg’s “Martinis at the Velvet Lounge?” and two different tunes referencing the James Bond character, in David Benoit’s “Shaken, Not Stirred” and Brian Hughes’ “Shakin’, Not Stirred.” Richard Elliot even holds a “License to Chill.”

Several venues have received commemorations over the years, including Fort Worth’s former Caravan of Dreams, for which there are two songs by that name by Acoustic Alchemy and Peter White. Doc Powell’s “97<sup>th</sup> and Columbus” is a track paying homage to the address of the now-defunct Mikell’s Jazz Club, one of the venues where Powell got his start as a performer. Baltimore native Gregg Karukas’ tune “Talbot Street Café” references nearby Ocean City, Maryland. Other restaurants frequented by jazz musicians on tour have received commemoration, including Philadelphia’s “Melrose Diner” by Richard Elliot and Seattle’s “14 Carrot Café” by Acoustic Alchemy.

Smooth jazz is quite the musical chameleon. It is unobtrusive enough to effectively sit in the background and set a mood as musical wallpaper amidst office work, weather forecasts, and commuting, but when receiving a listener’s undivided attention, it becomes quickly apparent that the music is sophisticated and emotional, and that the musicians are very skilled, which gets pronounced even more in the excitement of live performances (Giles 2012; Heckman 2001). Smooth jazz is also effective as a form of music therapy, with its capacity for enabling escape and for helping to “chill” and “de-stress” listeners. This has been encouraged by the format’s own name of “smooth” as well as from the crossover influences of New Age and ambient music. Thus, one should not be surprised to see the association of smooth jazz

with aspects of recreation and leisure, such as “3-Day Weekend” by Jeff Kashiwa, “De-Stress Signal” by Oli Silk, “Chillaxin” by Euge Groove, and many songs depicting cruises and popular sports including golf, soccer, basketball, and skiing.

### *Global Citizenship*

Guitarist Steve Oliver’s two most recent albums, *Global Kiss* and *World Citizen*, are evidence that smooth jazz musicians are not only creating music about particular places, but are also reflecting on their identity as part of a global community. Los Angeles native Paul Brown and French-born turned Spanish resident Marc Antoine released a collaborative album titled *Foreign Exchange*. Iranian-American guitar duo Shahin and Sepehr’s single “East-West Highway” exhibits influences of traditional Iranian music fused with more Western flamenco and new age. Some smooth jazz musicians, especially those also associated with new age music, have an almost animistic, spiritual connection with the environment, and have a deep concern for the health of the planet. Craig Chaquico’s “Acoustic Planet” and “Sacred Ground” are just two of many songs where he has applied his shimmering chorus pedal to soaring guitar melodies. Smooth jazz helps its listeners chill, but Joyce Cooling’s “Global Cooling” is not just a cute pun on the artist’s last name, but a reminder of a very important environmental issue. Keyboardist Bob Baldwin’s “Global Warming” features vocals from Ron “Focus” Manager that strive to bring awareness to climate change through mention of melting icebergs and increased tornadoes, and even urging listeners to recycle. This

song also promotes a message of love for all people, which is another important dream for a global community.

### **Landscapes Defined by Smooth Jazz**

In the last chapter of *Landscapes In Music*, Knight (2006) considered a reciprocal relationship between place and music, and turned his attention to how landscapes reflect music, such as how the Toronto Music Garden was designed around interpreting a Bach cello suite, and giving consideration to performance spaces as sites of music production.

Smooth jazz has had quite an effect on aural architecture, as it has become a preferred music to be broadcast in upscale shopping centers, fancy restaurants, amusement parks, and ritzy hotels. Connell and Gibson (2003) would say that the music is being exploited to help construct and reinforce a desired image. As noted earlier, smooth jazz has been piped into offices because of its positive effect on productivity and ability to reduce stress. In terms of performance space, smooth jazz concerts do not only take place in supper clubs and intimate arts centers, but also are frequently held at wineries, upscale hotel amphitheaters, and at outdoor festivals. Listeners of smooth jazz used to experience places in the Caribbean and Mediterranean virtually through recordings, but, since 2000, an emerging smooth jazz cruising industry has chartered 40 voyages to the Caribbean, Mexico, Alaska, and the Mediterranean, in which cruise-goers attend smooth jazz concerts of their favorite artists while at sea en route to some of the places they first became interested in through this music. Smooth jazz has even

infiltrated fictitious places, including Port Charles, New York, the setting of soap opera *General Hospital*, which features saxophonist Dave Koz's "Faces of the Heart" as the show's theme song.

### **Appropriation vs. Appreciation**

Listeners of contemporary jazz have been increasingly treated to exotic sounds as musicians fuse world music into their works. Keyboardist / composer Jeff Lorber recruited master throat singer Kongar-ol Ondar to provide the melody on "Tuva," the region most closely associated with overtone singing. Jesse Cook, a Canadian guitarist who specializes in New Flamenco but receives substantial airplay on contemporary jazz radio, collaborated with Los Gaiteros de San Jacinto, a traditional cumbia group from Colombia, on Cook's album *The Rumba Foundation*. This partnership spawned the radio hit "Bogota By Bus," which features Cook's virtuosic guitar playing atop authentic cumbia rhythms and instrumentation featuring the accordion.

Lorber and Cook's examples provide listeners with an opportunity to become more aware of traditional music from other locales, although critics might argue that this fusion of ethnic and popular music can lean more toward cultural appropriation than cultural appreciation. For example, pianist David Benoit's "Botswana Bossa Nova" is a strange title in terms of geography associated with musical styles. In an interview, Benoit said, "I loved the world mix of exotic ethnic percussion, African voices along with Brazilian beats. With the aid of the computer-sequencing program Logic Pro I came up with some of these new ideas" (Concord Music Group 2010).

### Case Study: Russ Freeman

One of the most prolific smooth jazz musicians over the past thirty years has been guitarist / composer Russ Freeman, who, since 1986, has led an ensemble called The Rippingtons. Freeman has also had several side projects consisting of solo work and collaborations with other contemporary jazz artists including David Benoit and Craig Chaquico. The Rippingtons' Web site (2014) acknowledges that he "has long had a penchant for naming songs and albums after exotic places" and that "Freeman's musical passport still has a lot of open space to be stamped, and the journey continues."

Mapping the specific place names found in the Freeman's song titles (Figure 3.6) reveals his deep wanderlust and interest in geography. In fact, several Rippingtons albums have been devoted to geographic themes, including *Kilimanjaro* (Africa), *Black Diamond* (ski resorts in the American Rockies), *Topaz* (portrays the American southwest), *Life in the Tropics* (South Florida and the Caribbean), and *Cote D'Azur* (French Riviera).

In order to musically depict place, Freeman has considered instrumentation, such as giving a carved wooden flute a mysterious sounding countermelody on "Taos." Afro-Cuban and Caribbean percussion provide rhythmic flavor to tunes like "Caribbean Breeze" (bongos) and "Island Aphrodisiac" (steel pan). In other cases, Freeman suggests place through the quotation and/or adaptation of regional styles. Freeman begins "Under A Spanish Moon" with a lively soleares-like guitar opening, while the rhythms and piano work in "Aruba!" was clearly modeled after Cuban "son" salsa music.



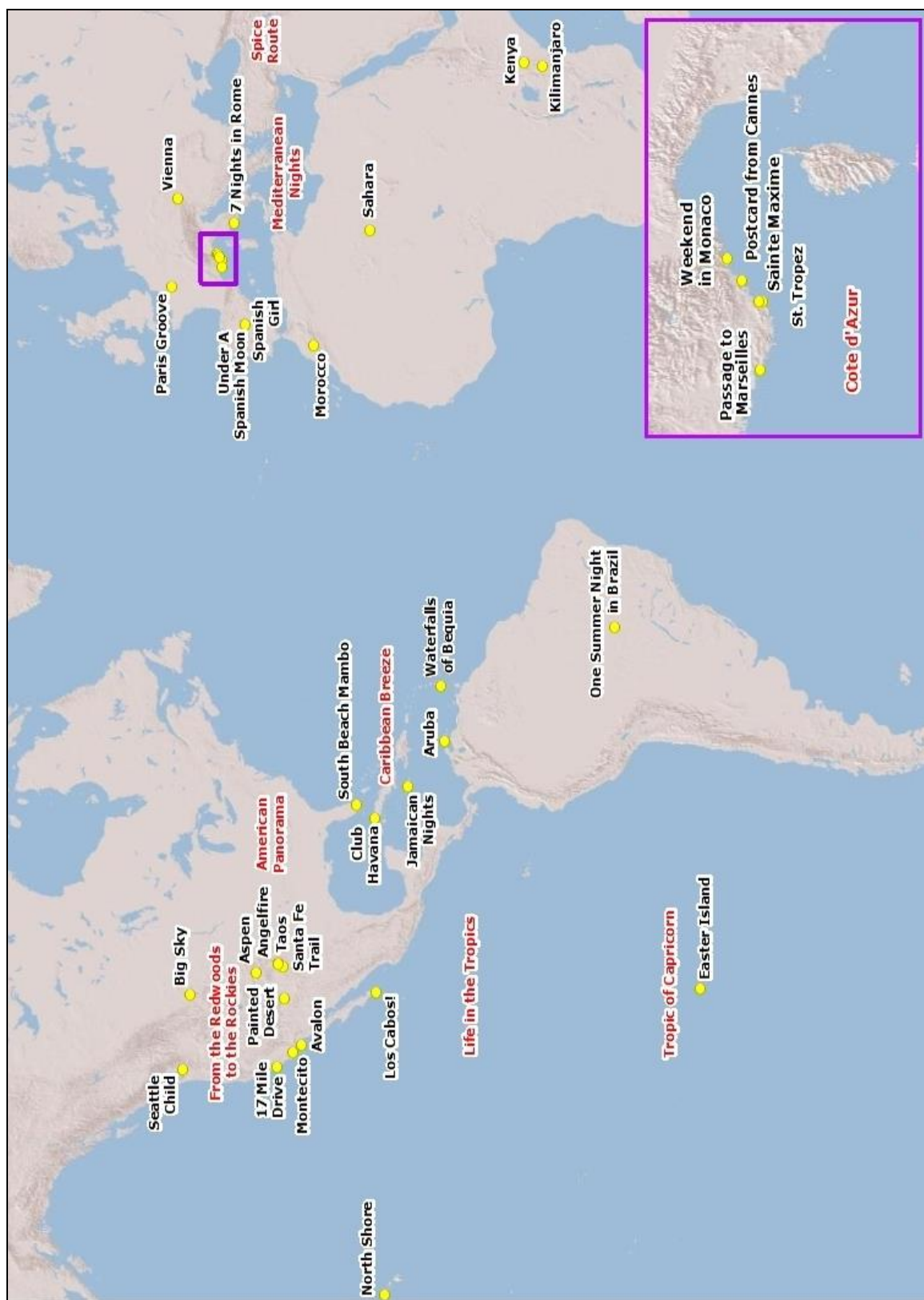


Figure 3.6: Russ Freeman's musical passport.

The newest Rippingtons project, the album *Fountain of Youth*, features waterscapes in four of its ten songs, including the title track, “Waterfalls of Bequia,” “Rivers of Gold,” and the radio single “North Shore,” which conjures up the coast of Oahu. The song begins with several seconds of ocean waves, before a keyboard synthesizer enters with a quick broken chord arpeggio that sparkles like spume. This up-tempo number (130 BPM) conjures up surfing with powerful electric guitar solos mimicking the energy of massive waves, and Freeman’s string bending on harmonics evokes the timbre of Hawaii’s musical export, the steel guitar. On “Spice Route,” Freeman incorporates a Turkish baglama, a seven-string folk instrument, which he purchased on a trip to Istanbul. Adding to the exotic feel of this song is its distinctive 7/4 time signature meter. Septuple meter is common in Turkish folk music, so some consideration was given to the musical setting of Freeman’s spice route.

Russ Freeman’s music reflects his time spent living in California, Colorado, and now Florida, along with his many travels, both on tour and for pleasure, which have taken him all over the world. He has taken abstractions of these experiences and transformed them into musical compositions for listeners to enjoy.

### **Name That Place**

During a presentation I gave at the 2014 Association of American Geographers conference over this research, I challenged the session attendees to see if they could listen to short sample clips of smooth jazz songs and match them to programmatic titles that were displayed on the screen. Instead of Name That Tune, this was Name That

Place. In the essence of time, only twenty seconds each of five different songs were played, and then I gave the correct answers at the end of the presentation. The attendees were impressive and achieved a unanimous perfect score. When we discussed how they went about choosing which title went with which sound clip, the responses included various musical parameters, such as instrumentation, melody, rhythm, tempo, and the other aspects discussed in this paper. Although the songs I chose were quite disparate to make this exercise much easier, it does show that smooth jazz artists and listeners are able to successfully communicate place through sound (Flynn 2014).

## **Conclusion**

As demonstrated through this analysis, place figures prominently in the musical subgenre of smooth jazz, with a large percentage of songs bearing specific and generic place names in their programmatic titles. It has been shown that musicians utilize a variety of musical parameters and sometimes incorporate natural sounds in order to conjure up place. Many types of places have served as inspirational fodder for musicians, from bodies of water to weather, as well as cultural features, such as urban landscapes, performance venues, technology, and recreational activities. When smooth jazz attempts to evoke place, just under half of this music specifically has the United States in mind. Interestingly, there has also been a great deal of attention given to other regions, notably the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Mediterranean. Armchair listeners of this music have the opportunity to virtually travel and escape to exotic

places. Smooth jazz performers serving as musical tour guides have incorporated aspects of local traditional music with varying degrees of authenticity, and always inject their own personal compositional autographs in order to create these works of fusion. It has been shown through several examples that the same landscape will be read, and ultimately sounded differently by different musicians, and listeners benefit by getting to experience different perspectives on place. Given that smooth jazz has traditionally strived for being unobtrusive, polished, and slick, many people find this music pleasant to listen to, and this can only improve listeners' perceptions of places depicted in the smooth jazz catalog.

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## CHAPTER IV

### SMOOTH JAZZ SCAPES AND ESCAPES:

#### EXPLORING THE VISUAL PACKAGING OF PLACE WITH MUSIC

##### **Abstract**

*The main function of album covers used to be one of providing protection for the media stored within, but, over time, their purpose has shifted toward utilizing visual imagery to market music. In recent years, album cover design has received increasing interdisciplinary scholarly consideration devoted to the emerging study of coverscapes. This paper seeks to contribute to this growing literature, from a geographic perspective, by identifying and examining themes of how place and lifestyle are represented in visual media associated with contemporary “smooth” jazz. Since the late 1980s, smooth jazz has been a commercially successful musical style, but it has been largely ignored by academics. The smooth jazz audience is typically characterized as affluent, educated, and middle-aged or older. While the primary focus of this paper is devoted to content analysis surrounding more than 1,600 album covers released by smooth jazz musicians over the past three decades, other forms of media, including print media, promotional materials, and music videos are also considered. The scapes of smooth jazz suggest that*

*this music's audience is able to enjoy the good life and that this music is able to provide listeners with virtual escapes to beautiful, and often exotic, places.*

## **Introduction**

"The Birth of the Album Cover" was considered to have taken place during the 1940s with the arrival of long play (LP) records (Connell and Gibson 2008, 53). Album covers were originally twelve inches in size and served the dual purpose of providing protection for the record inside, as well as serving as a visual advertisement for the music. Even with the evolution of music media that has seen records, cassettes, CDs, and now digital music, album art, despite its increasingly diminutive real estate, continues to serve as visual packaging accompanying the music. Unfortunately, very little scholarly attention has been devoted to album art.

In speaking to examples like *Album Cover Album* (Thorgerson and Dean 2008), *The Greatest Album Covers of All Time* (Miles, Scott, and Morgan 2005), and *Jazz Covers* (Paulo, Wiedemann, and Ciano 2008), Grønstad and Vågnes (2010, 11) lament that "On the whole neglected both by the disciplines of art history and cultural studies, the subject of the album cover had generally been relegated to the genre of coffee table books and to non-academic publications that for the most part seem content merely to present a given canon of cover art rather than engage critically with it."

Some scholars have written on music packaging, independent of graphic design, including Jones and Sorger (1999), Eisenberg (2005), and Mayer and Rauber (2010), but Grønstad and Vågnes (2010, 9) believed that album art, "Equally a part of popular



musical history and of visual culture, as well as straddling both the sphere of art and that of advertising” deserved “a phenomenology of its own.” Their anthology *Coverscaping: Discovering Album Aesthetics* (2010) was comprised of ten essay contributions by academics and professionals working in the fields of graphic design, musicology, art history, and packaging and publishing companies.

Album covers have started to receive treatment in recently published articles, including a study of the Beatles’ album covers (Inglis 2001), the geography of Bruce Springsteen’s *Born To Run* (Masur 2007), and a piece on progressive rock coverscapes (Curti and Craine 2011).

In their study of recordings of Hawaiian music, Connell and Gibson (2008) examined the importance of cover art in the marketing and consumption of the music, as well as the roles these covers had in driving tourism and shaping place perception. The authors stated that whereas postcards, book illustrations, and photographs had received scholarly attention, album covers had been an ignored artifact of popular culture. They contend that the elements of album art “seek to evoke images that the music is intended to capture. These components project powerful images that may colour the act of listening” (2008, 52). Connell and Gibson identified “women, dancing, palm trees, grass (raffia) skirts, sea, surf, sun, sand, and music and moonlight were both the cover designs and the texts of the covers” (2008, 72).

Connell and Gibson also discussed the idea of “virtual tourism,” in which “music could transport listeners to distant places” (2008, 52). Back in the day when travel was too expensive for most people, “Albums attempted to *capture* the sounds of faraway

places, transporting armchair listeners to idyllic holiday destinations, mysterious Pacific islands, Alpine heights or cosmopolitan European streetscapes. Music emphasized the delights of a handful of special places and created essentialists depictions of them” (2008, 59).

As evidenced in their article “You Can Judge an Artist by an Album Cover: Using Images for Music Annotation,” computer scientists L̄ibeks and Turnbull (2011) have been studying coverscapes from the standpoint of trying to develop computer algorithms that can predict musical styles based on similarities in visual appearance. By working with album covers and promotional photos of musical artists, the authors sought to use a joint equal contribution algorithm to accurately assign musical genre tags to imagery. In essence, a computer program was trained to select a musical style based on the loading of artist pictures and album covers. The researchers used the Web site Last.fm to pull popular genre tags, the most representative artists within each genre, and the five most popular promotional pictures and the five most popular album covers based on site voting. After assessing the accuracy of the computer program, the authors performed the same genre-assigning experiment by showing the imagery to nearly 400 people. Remarkably, both the human and computer trials performed better than a random success rate, and the computers outperformed people on several musical genres, most notably with metal. This study suggested that “music-related images provide us with a meaningful visual representation of sound” (L̄ibeks and Turnbull 2011, 30) and opened the door for the possibility of a listener receive suggestions for other music one might enjoy based on how the music looks. L̄ibeks and

Turbull argue that the “outward appearance or image of an artist can play a role in how their music is received by audiences” (30). This research suggested that musical styles often have a great degree of homogeneity in their album cover art and that this imagery is powerful in its ability to connect with an audience.

Although, much of the attention given to album art has been devoted to rock album art, whose covers “indulge in fantasy, dreamy or nightmarish or both” while classical, adult pop, and jazz records “generally settle for a straight photograph of the performer (Eisenberg 2005, 54). Jones and Sorger (1999, 74) explained that “Jazz album covers generally have continued to avoid crass visuals...Headline-sized names and titles are not simply slapped onto covers; instead there is a feeling of discretion and subtlety on jazz album covers. Portraits of jazz musicians are also more straightforward and less superficial or commercial than those of rock musicians” (74). In speaking about jazz albums of the 1950s, Jones and Sorger (1999, 74) contended that “jazz inspired the most sophisticated and varied group of covers” and “Conscious attempts were made to link visuals and music. Jazz covers maintained a sense of integrity and dedication to the music” (74).

### **Approach and Research Questions**

The label “smooth jazz” was originally conceived at a broadcasting industry focus group during the late 1980s, and was soon applied to a newly emerging radio format originally comprised of jazz, fusion, new age, R&B, and adult contemporary. Considering that smooth jazz is a crossover category of music, it was necessary to come up with an

authoritative classification of which artists and groups would be included and excluded from this study. One of the largest online music databases is Rovi Corporation's All Music Guide, which evolved from a series of reference books, first published and edited by Michael Erlewine in 1992. The database includes metadata about artists, albums, and tracks, and Rovi maintains a staff of editors to review music and classify content. The All Music Guide has a genre category of Smooth Jazz, defined as:

*Smooth Jazz is an outgrowth of fusion, one that emphasizes its polished side. Generally, smooth jazz relies on rhythms and grooves instead of improvisation. There are layers of synthesizers, lite-funk rhythms, lite-funk bass, elastic guitars, and either trumpets, alto, or soprano saxophones. The music isn't cerebral, like hard bop, nor is it gritty and funky like soul-jazz or groove -- it is unobtrusive, slick, and highly polished, where the overall sound matters more than the individual parts (Rovi 2013).*

According to Mayer and Rauber (2010, 333), "Album covers are carefully designed by artists to convey a message that is consistent with the message sent by the music on the album as well as by the image of a band in general. Music videos, fan sites, and other sources of information add to that in a usually coherent manner."

This article will consider just that, by investigating how place and lifestyle are portrayed in visual media associated with the musical style of smooth jazz. While the primary focus is placed on album covers released by smooth jazz musicians over the past three decades, other forms of media, including print media, promotional materials, and music videos are also considered. This manuscript gives attention to a commercially successful musical style that has received very little academic consideration, and contributes to a growing literature on coverscapes, while exploring a marriage of music, art, and advertising.

This paper seeks to address several questions:

- What specific places or general types of places are prominent in smooth jazz album covers?
- What is the relevance of the featured place to the performer and/or music on the album?
- Besides the location/scenery, what other items/icons are included that could help create a genre-wide visual profile of “smoothness,” make a connection with a prospective shopper, and/or entice a purchase?

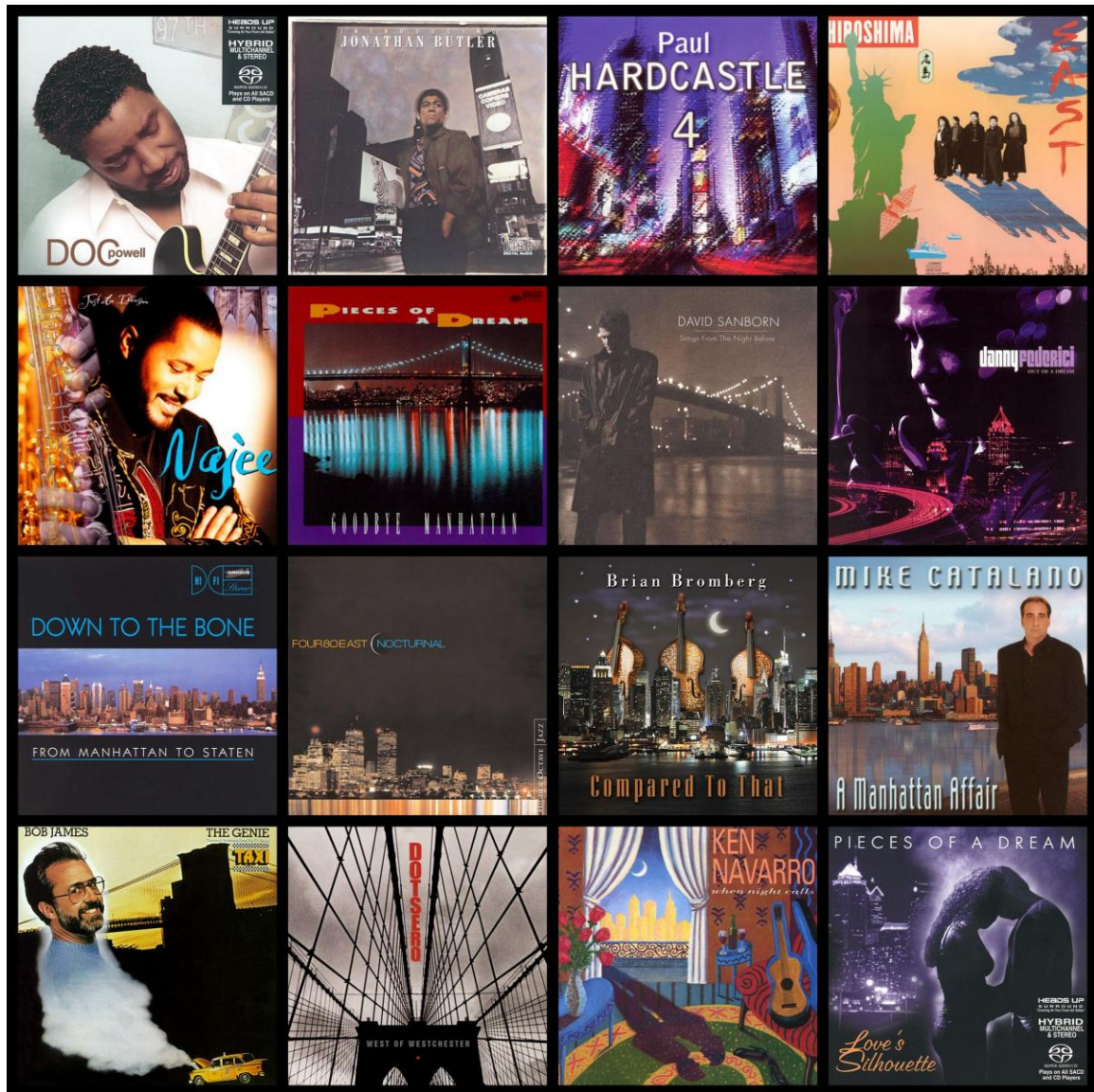
### **Album Coverscapes**

Using Rovi’s application programming interface (API), a script was written to retrieve and locally store 1,606 album cover images for a total of 204 smooth jazz artists and groups. These images were loaded into Adobe Lightroom 5 so that content analysis could be performed. For each album cover, one or more keywords were assigned in order to exhaustively describe what imagery and iconography was present. Additionally, any album covers containing any readily identifiable specific places were plotted within Lightroom’s mapping module with latitude and longitude coordinates.

Following the completion of the keyword tagging, similar tags were grouped into parent categories and preliminary tag names were refined. On a quantitative basis, the categories with the most occurrences have been utilized as themes for the discussion that follows, and the best examples of each theme have been included in the collages that appear in the figures.

### *Specific Places*

By far and away, New York City received the most attention, getting featured prominently in no fewer than two-dozen smooth jazz album covers (see examples in Figure 4.1). The Manhattan skyline appears frequently as a backdrop, taken from various vantage points, usually from across the Hudson River or East River. A daytime picture, such as Mike Catalano's *A Manhattan Affair* is rare, with most of the city's depictions taking place at night, such as illustrations for Four80East's *Nocturnal* and Brian Bromberg's *Compared to That*, with the latter incorporating his instrument (bass) into the skyline. As will be discussed later, a sizable proportion of smooth jazz is mood music, and many album covers have illustrations that suggest the sensuality of this music, represented through silhouettes and intimacy of couples, as seen in Ken Navarro's *When Night Calls* and Pieces of a Dream's *Love's Silhouette*, which both have the skyline of Manhattan in the background.



**Figure 4.1:** Smooth jazz album covers depicting New York City.

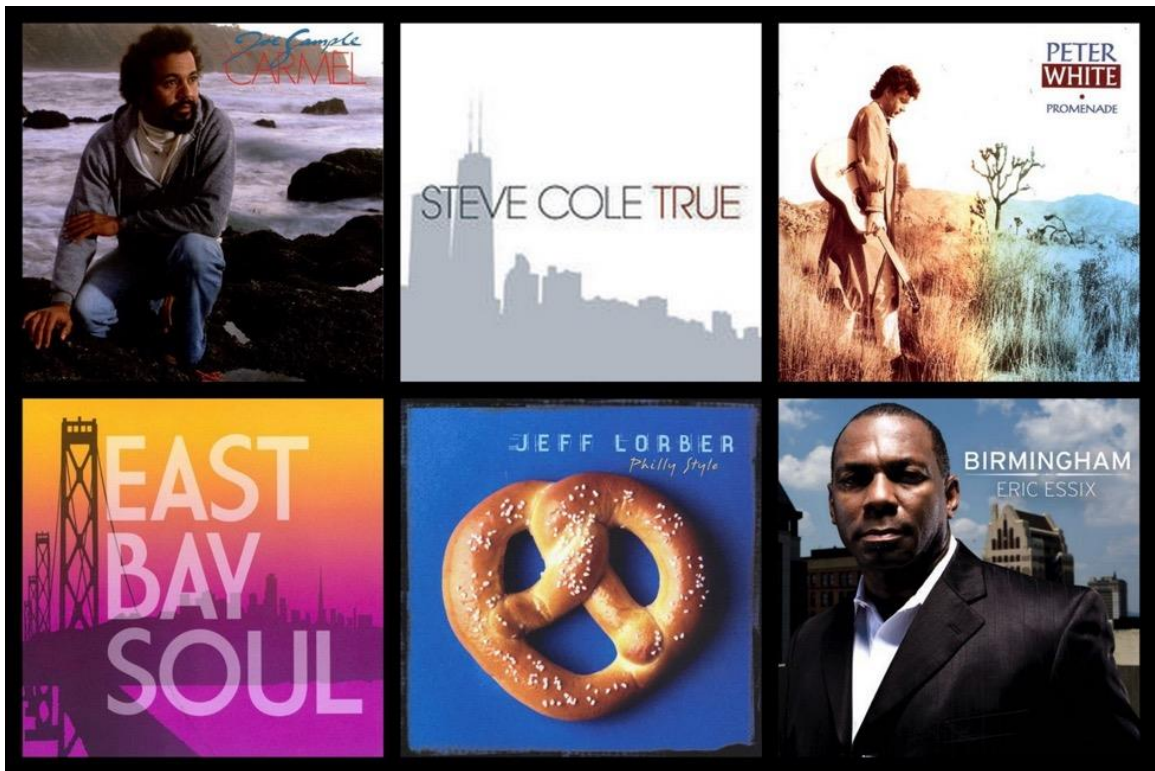
Several of the Big Apple's bridges are also prominently visible in the coverscapes of New York. David Sanborn stands in Brooklyn with the Manhattan Bridge behind him on *Songs from the Night Before* and a nighttime picture of the Manhattan Bridge illustrates Pieces of a Dream's *Goodbye Manhattan* album. The Brooklyn Bridge appears in the upper-right corner of Najee's *Just an Illusion* album, and again on both Bob James' *The Genie* and Dotsero's *West of Westchester*.

On Doc Powell's album *97th and Columbus*, street signs behind the portrait of the guitarist reference the intersection near the site of Mikells, a now-defunct jazz club that was one of the venues where Powell started his performing career. Times Square is featured on both Paul Hardcastle's *Hardcastle 4* and Jonathan Butler's *Introducing Jonathan Butler*, with the cover placing the South African guitarist in the heart of the United States' largest city. Hiroshima, an Asian-American fusion band formed in Los Angeles, includes an icon of the Statue of Liberty on their album *East*. Whereas, globally speaking, Japan would be considered to be part of the East and the United States would be included in the West, the choice of iconography may be suggesting New York as the "East" from a U.S.-centric perspective.

In addition to New York City, viewers of smooth jazz album cover art will also recognize other places that have been represented by the artists (see examples in Figure 4.2). Sometimes, landscapes are so unique that the location of a picture is easily identifiable, such as in Peter White's *Promenade*, which has the British guitarist walking amongst Joshua Trees in Southern California. On *Carmel*, pianist Joe Sample crouched down on the shoreline of the scenic coastal California town. East Bay Soul's self-titled album features the Bay Bridge with the San Francisco skyline in the background, perhaps paying homage to the city where the group's featured soloist, trumpeter Greg Adams, has lived most of his life. Chicago native and saxophonist Steve Cole includes the skyline of The Windy City on the cover art for his album *True*. Keyboardist Jeff Lorber, who hails from Philadelphia, showed a little more imagination and humor in using a soft pretzel to represent *Philly Style*. The sense of place for one's home is important to many smooth



jazz musicians, and can be seen in the album covers of guitarist Eric Essix, who was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. On the cover of *Birmingham*, Essix is standing on a downtown rooftop, with the Watts Building, a 17-story Art Deco building built in 1927, clearly visible behind his left shoulder.



**Figure 4.2:** Smooth jazz album covers depicting specific places.

### *Impressionism*

Film composer and guitarist Craig Sharmat charted a hit in 2013 with his song “A Day In Paris,” which blended gypsy jazz with contemporary jazz. The success of that single encouraged Sharmat to pursue an idea he had for a concept album, which was ultimately released as *Bleu Horizons* (Figure 4.3), and is described by Sharmat as “an

international travelogue with a contemporary jazz flair. I wanted this to be a vehicle for my guitar playing, composing and arranging skills. It is also meant to sound fun and loose, I did not wish to be bound by traditional approaches” (Sharmat 2013). The album commences in New York City with “Manhattan Morning,” crosses the Atlantic for three songs about Paris (i.e., “La Seine Strut”), and later moves to Mumbai (i.e., “Mumbai Mojo”), Rio de Janeiro (i.e., “Sol E Oceano” and “Agua Do Brasil”), and finally returns to the United States (“Open Plains”). During the album’s stay in Mumbai, one of the imaginative tracks is titled “Surfing the Caspian Sea.” The Caspian Sea is an enclosed body of water not known for much surf, and it is more than two thousand miles from Mumbai. Better surf in closer proximity could likely be found along the Arabian Sea.



**Figure 4.3:** Craig Sharmat’s album *Bleu Horizons*.

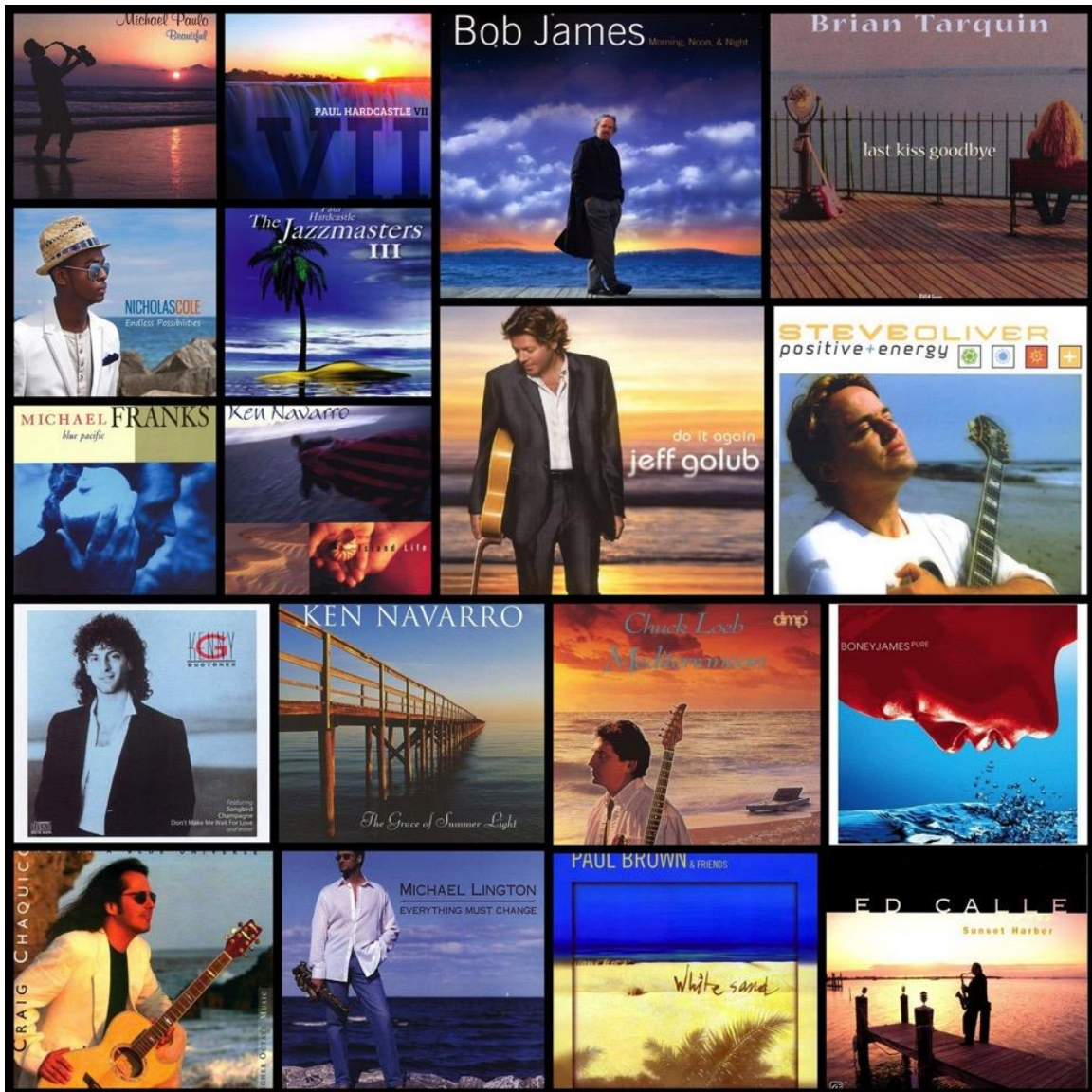
The album art for *Bleu Horizons* features Sharmat standing on the face of a guitar that is floating in an ocean. He is dressed in a white artist smock and a black beret.

Sharmat is painting the musical notation for “A Day In Paris” on a canvas, and his palette contains musical instruments rather than watercolor paint. The skyline in the background is a fantasy, as it juxtaposes structures extracted from various skylines, such as the Eiffel Tower from Paris and the Petronas Towers from Kuala Lumpur. Additionally, this scene includes beautiful representations of water and sky, both of which are frequently incorporated into smooth jazz coverscapes, and will be discussed in upcoming sections.

### *Waterscapes*

Looking at the results of the content analysis, the theme that received the most keyword tags was waterscapes, with a total of 110 covers (6.8% of all albums) featuring images, such as oceans, rivers, lakes, beaches, pools, fountains, and waterfalls. The collage in Figure 4.4 shows 18 examples of smooth jazz album covers depicting waterscapes. Several musicians have posed with their instruments on various beaches, including guitarists Craig Chaquico, Jeff Golub, Chuck Loeb, and Steve Oliver, and saxophonists Ed Calle, Michael Lington, and Michael Paulo. Michael Franks listens to the sounds of a conch shell on the cover of *Blue Pacific* and shells are shown in a hand on the cover of Ken Navarro’s *Island Life*. Paul Hardcastle has frequently incorporated waterscapes into his album covers, such as a waterfall on *Hardcastle VII* and an illustration of a desert island on his *The Jazzmasters III* release. Boardwalks appear on Bob James’ *Morning, Noon & Night* and Brian Tarquin’s *Last Kiss Goodbye*, and piers are featured on Ken Navarro’s *The Grace of Summer Light* and Ed Calle’s *Sunset Harbor*.

Water is refreshing, cleansing, and can be symbolic of purification, reflection, and renewal.



**Figure 4.4:** Smooth jazz album covers depicting waterscapes.

### *Weatherscapes*

Moving from blue water to blue skies, smooth jazz has also been concerned with weather. A total of 100 covers (6.2% of all albums) were tagged for featuring

characteristics including the sun, skies, clouds, fog, rain, rainbows, lightning, heat, and wind.

Figure 4.5 shows a collage of 13 albums that are concerned with sky and clouds, including Ramsey Lewis' *Sky Islands*. Fair weather is the overwhelming preference across smooth jazz albums. Coverscapes typically seek out a brilliant blue sky with some fair weather cumulus clouds for visual interest. This technique has been used in several albums, including Fourplay's *Let's Touch the Sky* and to define the outline of a guitar for Lee Ritenour's *On the Line*. At the top-left of the collage, Chuck Mangione points his flugelhorn at a stray cloud on the cover of *Chase the Clouds Away*. Big and Interesting skies can also add visual interest to a scene. The sky fills roughly 80% of the image on Grover Washington's *Come Morning*. The lighting and texture of the sky adds drama to the silhouette of Larry Carlton walking with his guitar case on *Deep Into It*. On Acoustic Alchemy's *This Way*, the way that the clouds envelop the sun injects a sense of mystery and suspense.



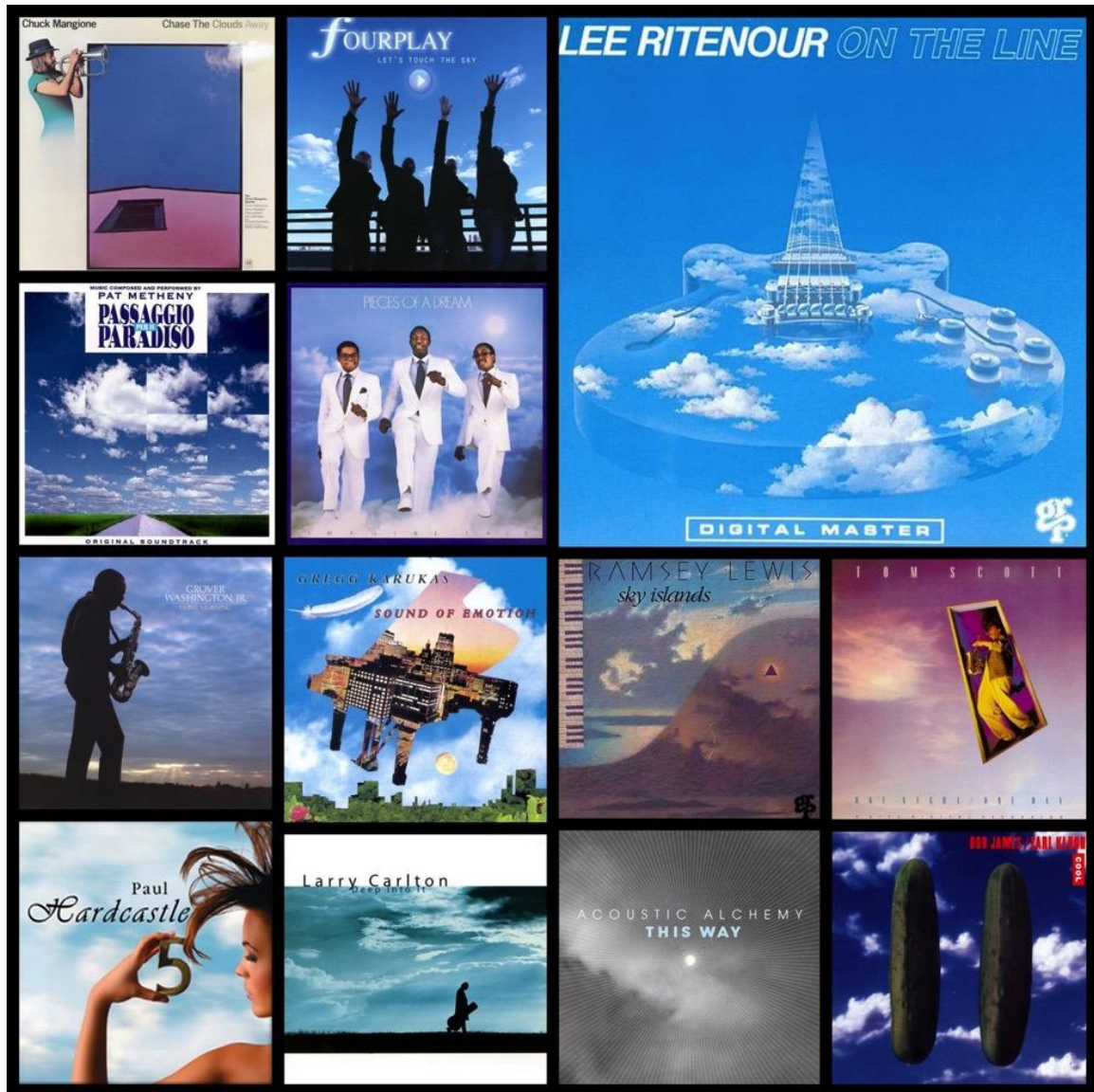


Figure 4.5: Smooth jazz album covers depicting sky and clouds.

Much like waterscapes, rain can be refreshing, rejuvenating, and relaxing. Figure 4.6 showcases examples of some smooth jazz albums that depict overcast skies and rain. Fog and mist can be seen in Keiko Matsui's *Under Northern Lights* and Craig Chaquico's *Acoustic Highway*. These artists tend to play music that is categorized on the New Age side of smooth jazz. In the bottom row of the collage, the band members of Acoustic

Alchemy stand on a wet street on *American/English*, rain is falling on the covers of both Brian Culbertson's *Dreams* and Pat Metheny's *One Quiet Night*, and Rick Braun provides a sensual image of a woman's wet face on the cover art of *Kisses in the Rain*.



**Figure 4.6:** Smooth jazz album covers depicting mist and rain.

Along with the fondness for fair skies also comes an appreciation for the sun. Figure 4.7 contains a collage of album covers that depict the sun and heat. In some cases, like Kevin Toney's *110 Degrees and Rising* and Alex Bugnon's song "107 Degrees In the Shade," the heat is literal, but in other cases it is a metaphorical heat likely having to do with the virtuosity of the performer and/or the sensuality of the music. Eric Marienthal is pictured in a sleeveless shirt revealing his muscular arms while playing his saxophone on *Turn Up the Heat*. A silhouette of Nick Colionne, who was born and raised in Chicago, can be seen playing guitar while a sun rises behind the Sears Tower.

Additional symbolism for the sun of radiance and shine can be found in the covers of guitarist Steve Oliver's *Radiant* and saxophonist Jessie J's *Hot Sauce*.



Figure 4.7: Smooth jazz album covers depicting sun and heat.

The linkage between smooth jazz and weather is not at all surprising, considering that for decades, this music was ubiquitous as the soundtrack behind the Weather Channel's Local-On-the-8s forecasts, as exemplified through the video example in Figure 8, a segment for Stillwater, Oklahoma from the night of January 31, 2011 that included the music of saxophonist Vincent Ingala. Former Weather Channel producer Steve Hurst promoted smooth jazz as the predominant instrumental music that one would hear when tuning in to get the upcoming week's forecast. Hurst's goal was to find "music that may appeal to a wide audience without turning off sophisticated listeners" (Klinkenberg 2003). The Weather Channel has since released two CD anthologies of smooth jazz songs featured on-air during forecasts (Figure 4.9). These two coverscapes

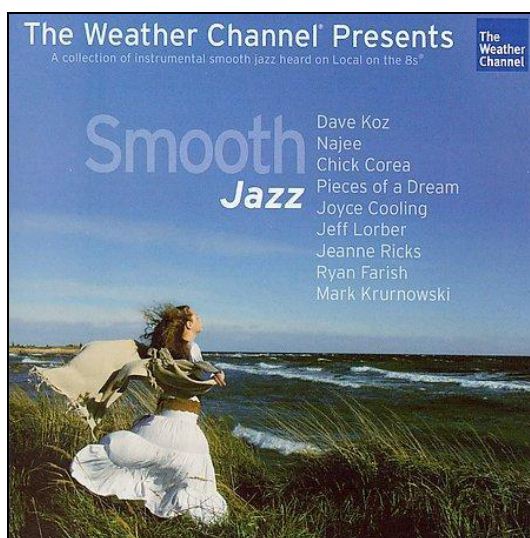


are both situated seaside and feature fair skies. The album cover of the first anthology (released in 2007) evokes a strong ocean breeze through the woman's windblown hair and dress, while the second album (2008) features a deck and chair, suggesting that it would be a pleasant day to sit outdoors and presumably listen to this music.



**Figure 4.8:** Weather Channel Local-On-the-8s segment for Stillwater, Oklahoma.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbWX0wVqsXQ>

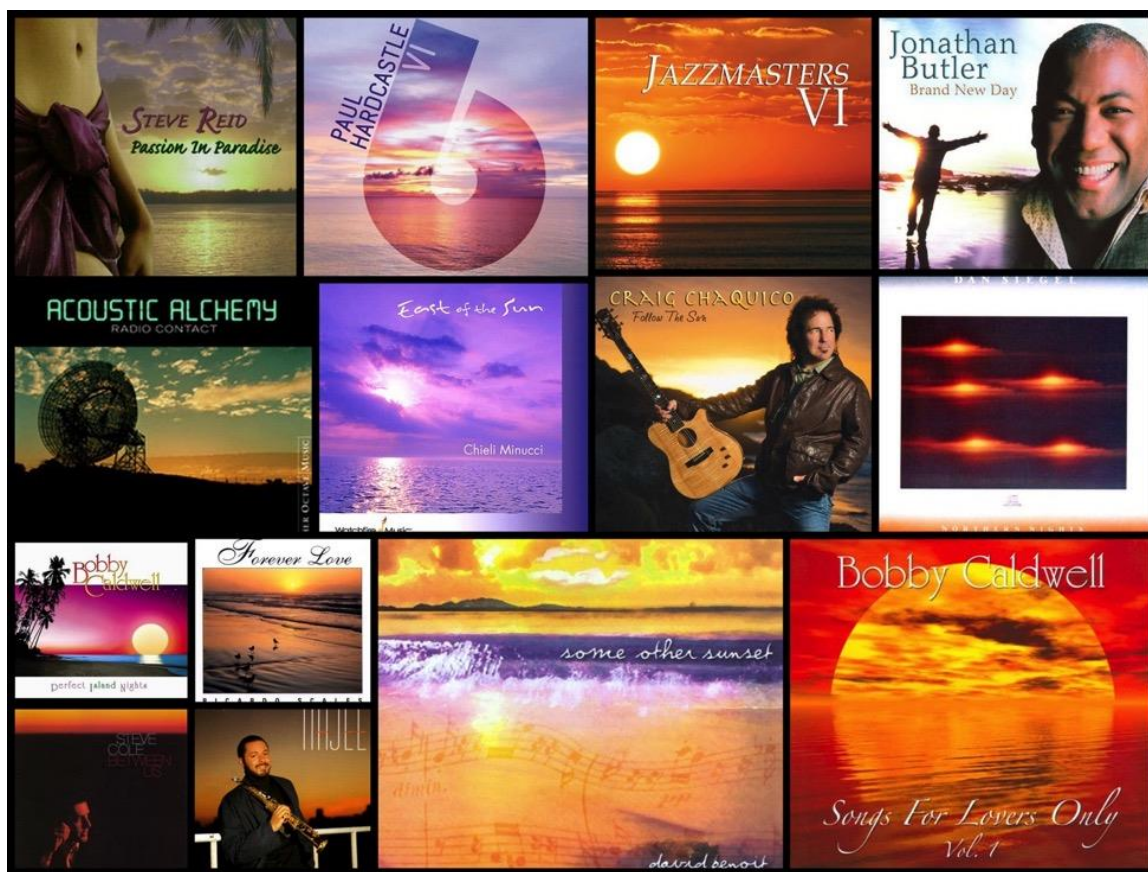


**Figure 4.9:** Weather Channel's smooth jazz compilation CDs.

## *On Time*

The portrayal of time can occur in terms of season or as part of the diurnal cycle. With respect to time of year, the warmth and sunshine found in summer is highly promoted, however winter-themed covers do appear prominently, primarily due to the dozens of holiday albums that smooth jazz musicians have recorded over the past few decades. Compared with seasons, the diurnal cycle is much easier to distinguish in cover art. There have been roughly twice as many album covers featuring night scenes as those reflecting daytime. This preference for night can be seen throughout many of the collages in this paper, where city lights, nightlife, and evening romance are illustrated.

The portions of the day that have been most capitalized upon, however, are dusk and dawn, with sunsets and sunrises providing much glow and artistic lighting. Figure 4.10 captures some of the album covers where the sun can be found near the horizon, including Craig Chaquico's *Follow the Sun* and Chieli Minucci's *East of the Sun*. Sunrise represents a new beginning, explaining the joy expressed on the cover of Jonathan Butler's *Brand New Day*. Sunset is one of the most romantic times of day, which explains its depiction on albums like Bobby Caldwell's *Songs for Lovers Only*, Steve Cole's *Between Us*, Steve Reid's *Passion In Paradise*, and Ricardo Scales' *Forever Love*. It should be noticed that most of these covers not only employ sunrises and sunsets, but also incorporate waterscapes. David Benoit's *Some Other Sunset* superimposes a piano score into the shore. One sun was not enough for Dan Siegel for his *Northern Nights* album, so this manipulated image has five suns.



**Figure 4.10:** Smooth jazz album covers depicting sunrise/sunset.

### *Transportation and Travel*

Another major theme found in smooth jazz coverscapes is transportation and travel. Musicians are frequently on the move, whether the travel relates to giving performances or simply taking vacations. A total of 131 covers (8.1% of all albums) involved images and/or iconography featuring various vehicles, transportation infrastructure, and travel.

Considering that smooth jazz is a musical style that was originally born out of an American radio format, and given America's love of the automobile (and dependence upon it), it only seems natural that album covers would feature cars (Figure 4.11).



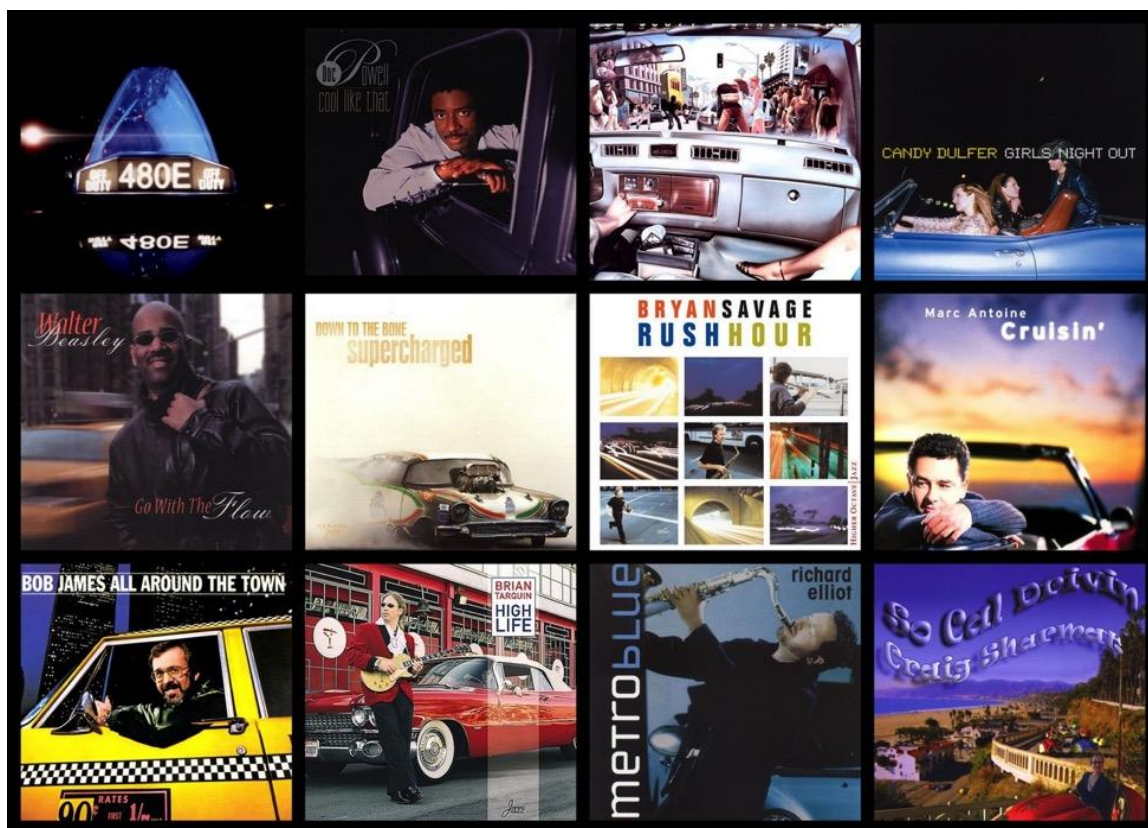


Figure 4.11: Smooth jazz album covers depicting taxis and cars.

Keyboardist Bob James, seen driving the New York taxicab on the cover of *All Around the Town*, is well known for his song “Angela,” which was the theme song for the television show *Taxi*. Two other album covers in the collage feature taxis, including Walter Beasley’s *Go With the Flow* and Four80East’s *Off Duty*, which creatively uses “480E” as the ID number on the base of the cab’s roof light. Convertibles can be found on Richard Elliot’s *Metro Blue*, Marc Antoine’s *Cruisin’*, and Candy Dulfer’s *Girls Night Out*. Guitarist Brian Tarquin can be found playing in front of a classic car on *High Life*, while a souped-up car is featured on Down to the Bone’s *Supercharged*. Craig Sharmat’s *So-Cal Drivin* features an artificially manipulated scene where people are driving bumper cars along the coast of Southern California. Bryan Savage’s *Rush Hour* features time-

lapse photographs of traffic on streets and tunnels interspersed with pictures of Savage playing flute under a highway interchange and carrying a saxophone across a crosswalk. The artwork on Tom Scott's *Street Beat* shows a man driving a car through Los Angeles. All that can be seen of his female passenger are bare legs wearing heels. The roominess of the vehicle and wood-grain interior suggest that this is a luxury vehicle. This falls in line with smooth jazz listeners, who have been analyzed in radio broadcasting surveys and reported to be very affluent, often purchasing luxury cars from Jaguar, Mercedes Benz, BMW, and Volvo.

In addition to vehicles, smooth jazz coverscapes also feature roads, as seen in Figure 4.12. Richard Elliot's *In the Zone* and Four80East's *En Route* are two examples where highway scenes have been used on album covers. While some examples of cover art embrace urban streets, such as Spyro Gyra's *Point of View*, which includes street, curb, sidewalk, and hydrant, in *Next Exit*, Grover Washington appears to be walking down an empty road in search of something simpler. Sometimes the "road" is more of a metaphor, as in Keiko Matsui's *The Road...*, with the road drawn from piano keys, or the long stretch of blacktop covering Brian Hughes' album *Along the Way*. Two album covers feature yellow warning signs. Spyro Gyra, a contemporary jazz group that has performed actively for several decades, noted the amount of ground the band has covered through touring on *Road Scholars*. The album's title is a humorous pun on the prestigious Rhodes scholarship, and features a highly circuitous path on its warning sign. There is a question mark on the album *Sign of the Times*, with Bob James playing at a

grand piano on the side of the road. These warning signs could be considered to be symbolic of the improvisatory and meandering nature of jazz.



**Figure 4.12:** Smooth jazz album covers depicting streets, roads, and signs.

Another mode of transportation frequently found in smooth jazz coverscapes is that of rail travel. Figure 4.13 includes several album covers portraying trains and subways. Gerald Veasley's *On the Fast Track* has a train traveling along an electric guitar track, similar to the guitar in Craig Sharmat's *Bleu Horizons*. On *Going Underground*, saxophonist Paul "Shilts" Weimar, who hails from London, incorporated the infamous logo of the Tube. Sets of train tracks can be found on Eric Marienthal's *Round Trip*, Pat Metheny's *What It's All About*, and Marc Antoine's *Guitar Destiny*. Metheny grew up in the rail town of Lee's Summit, Missouri and had a successful radio single with "Last Train Home." Antoine's tracks symbolize his "joy of traveling, especially on trains" (Antoine

2012). While Ken Navarro is apparently *Dreaming of Trains*, the role of the train on Brian Hughes' *Fast Train to a Quiet Place* seems to be more about escape. Down to the Bone's *Dig It* is stylized after the New York City subway, with the letters of the album titles represented as different train identifiers. Down to the Bone's *From Manhattan to Staten* was included in the Figure 4.1 collage. One would think that Down to the Bone has some deep New York ties, but this is not the case at all. This act is actually the brainchild of Stuart Wade, a British DJ who does not happen to play any instruments. Wade records his musical ideas by humming into a Dictaphone, which then gets passed along to the group's musicians to create the studio recording. Down to the Bone actually has two different band lineups—one that is active in the United Kingdom and another that performs in the United States.



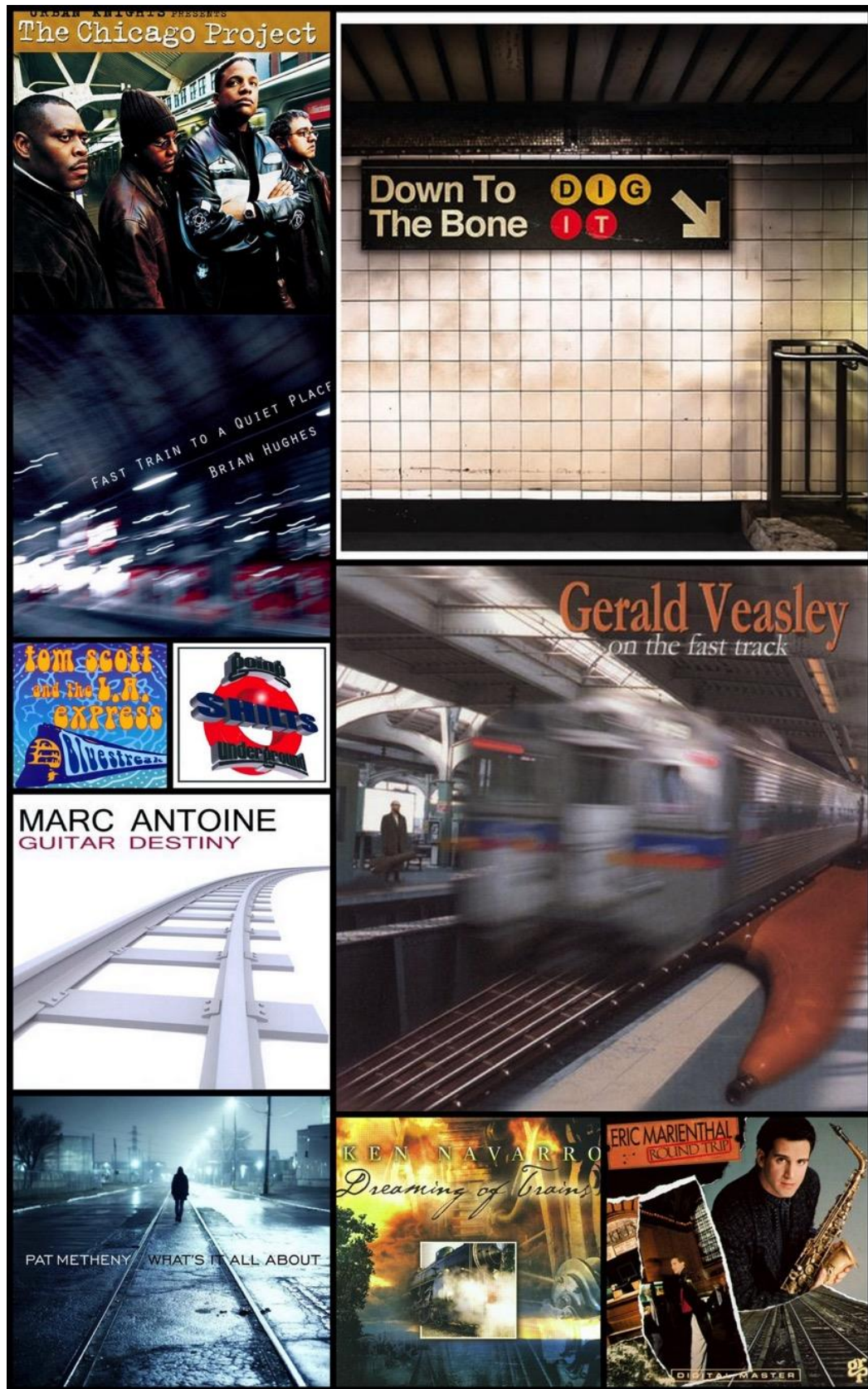


Figure 4.13: Smooth jazz album covers depicting rail transportation.



Another subtheme of transportation and travel is that of air travel (see Figure 4.14). Ramsey Lewis can be seen holding a model Pan Am jet on *Goin' Latin*, David Sanborn plays a sax in the shadow of an airplane on *Taking Off*, and Richard Elliot is standing on top of a cockpit playing a saxophone on the cover of *Take To the Skies*.



**Figure 4.14:** Smooth jazz album covers depicting air travel.

Aside from modes of transportation, several album covers illustrate travel in other ways (Figure 4.15), such as through pictorial vignettes filling the cover of the Pat Metheny Group's *Travels*. Numerous album covers feature stylized stamps, as can be seen on Philippe Saisse's *Next Voyage* and on *Foreign Xchange*, a collaboration between American guitarist Paul Brown and French guitarist Marc Antoine. Acoustic Alchemy's *Back On the Case* features two guitar cases that are filled with stickers, including American Airlines and the initials for Great Britain. Acoustic Alchemy began as a guitar duo comprised of Greg Carmichael and the late Nick Webb, and launched their career back in the 1980s by recording the in-flight musical entertainment for Virgin Airlines.



**Figure 4.15:** Smooth jazz album covers featuring travel imagery.

### *Cityscapes*

As seen already with *Manhattan*, a great deal of smooth jazz coverscapes reflect a fascination with urban landscapes, and cities grace the artwork of many albums. In the case of *Hiroshima*, the band has stayed true to its roots within Little Tokyo, a four-acre Japanese-American district in the heart of Los Angeles (Figure 4.16). *Hiroshima*'s album art often employs imagery incorporating origami cranes, the Yin Yang symbol of

East Asian philosophy, and Japanese script, frequently sharing space with the palm trees and cityscapes of Los Angeles.



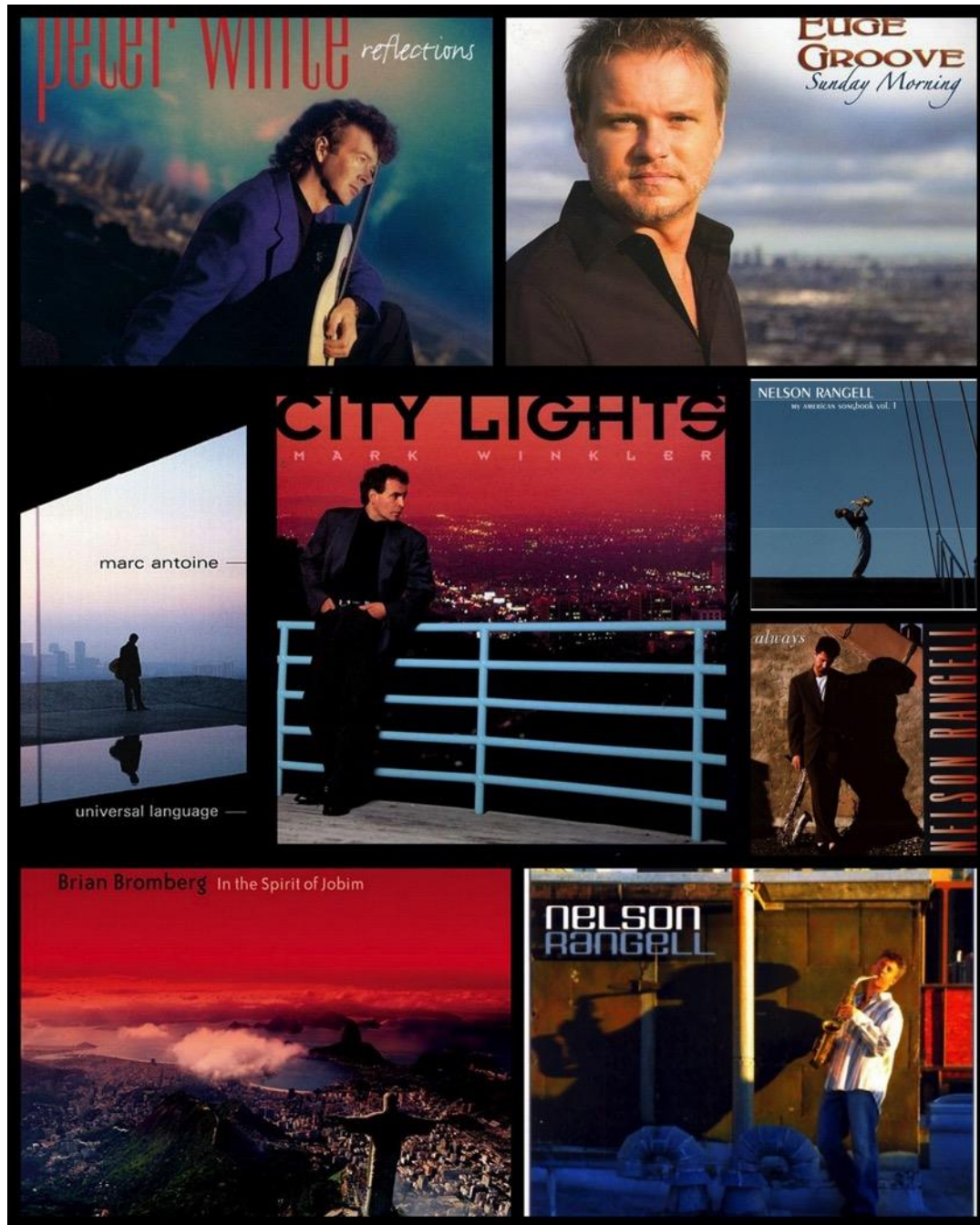
**Figure 4.16:** Selected examples of Hiroshima’s album covers.

On *Little Tokyo*, the cover art features a recolored image of an actual navigation sign indicating the relative direction of Little Tokyo, along with the neighboring Toy District and Warehouse District. The roadway pictured on the cover of *The Bridge* is a westward-facing scene of the 1st Street Bridge, which crosses the Los Angeles River immediately before entering Little Tokyo. This bridge also serves as the setting for the first half of the band’s 1983 music video for “San Say” (sensei). In 2013, Hiroshima

released *J-Town Beat*, which has the band walking down East 1st Street in front of the J Morey Co insurance office ([link to Google Street View](#)). In the background, one can see Toshi Suhi and the Chop Suey Café and Lounge. The name of the album and band have replaced the street name and block number on the stylized Los Angeles street sign found on the left side of the cover image.

Sometimes the hustle and bustle of the city is too much to take, and the soothing nature of smooth jazz allows listeners to leave behind the commotion and relax. The visual imagery that gets packaged with the music supports this notion that smooth jazz can serve as an escape and raise the heights of one's spirits. Figure 4.17 includes numerous album covers photographed from vantage points above and away from cities, such as a scene of Rio de Janeiro taken from Corcovado Mountain on Brian Bromberg's *In the Spirit of Jobim*. Other instances include Euge Groove's *Sunday Morning* (a day that most people do not need to commute), Peter White's *Reflections*, Marc Antoine's *Universal Language*, and Mark Winkler's *City Lights*. The San Gabriel Mountains offer naturally elevated views of the much-frequented subject of Los Angeles, but in other cases, a rooftop of a skyscraper can often get one high enough above the noise and crowds. Saxophonist Nelson Rangell has no fewer than three album covers where he has escaped to play on a rooftop.

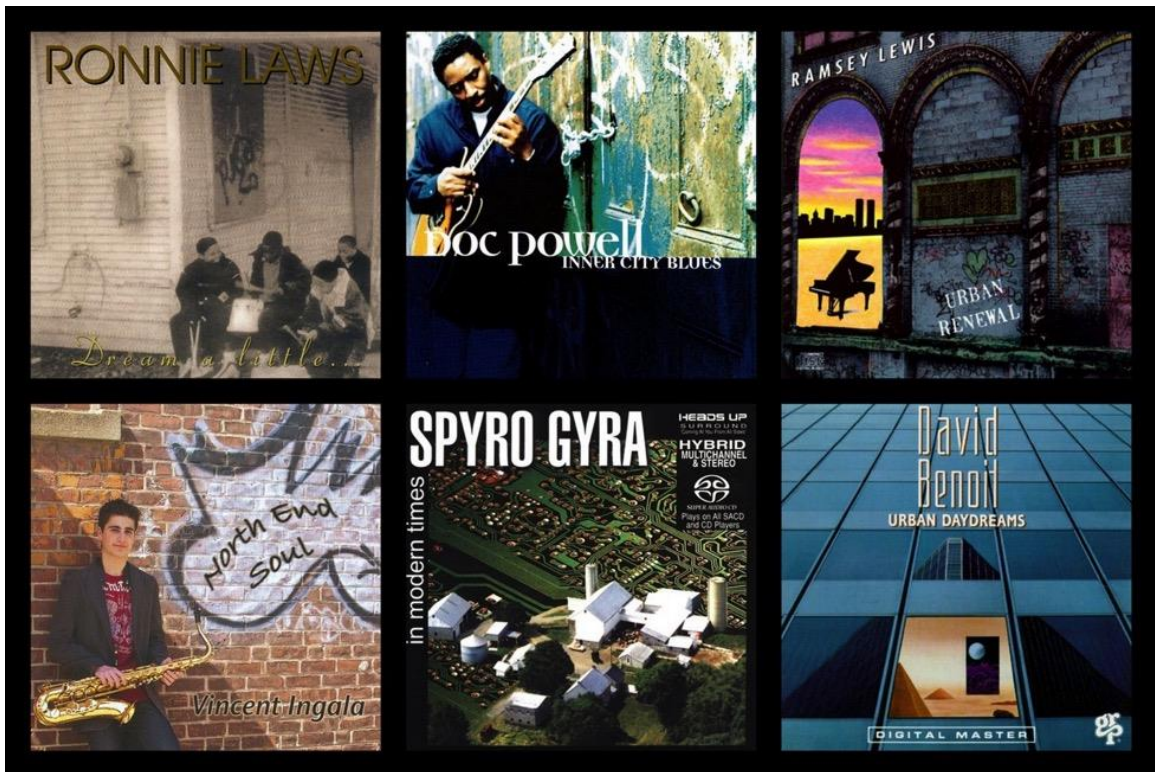




**Figure 4.17:** Smooth jazz album covers set at overlooks and rooftops.

Krin Gabbard (1995, 1-2) has written that “Advertisers no longer use jazz to connote the nightlife and slumming that can be purchased along with their products—jazz can now signify refinement and upper class status, once the exclusive province of

classical music.” The smooth jazz coverscapes support Gabbard’s hypothesis, as only five album covers received keyword tags of ghetto and/or graffiti. Some of these are shown in Figure 4.18, including Ronnie Laws’ *Dream A Little* and Doc Powell’s *Inner City Blues*. Vincent Ingala, an up-and-coming young sax player, can be seen posed up against a brick building for the cover of *North End Soul*, but the graffiti displaying the album title is really stylized pastiche.



**Figure 4.18:** Smooth jazz album covers reflecting on urban geography.

Continuing along the lines of the messages sent through the overlooks and rooftops, several album covers suggest a desire for something better than the current state of affairs in urban settings. Ramsey Lewis’ *Urban Renewal* has a dreary,

dilapidated building with graffiti on the walls, but a view through a portal reveals a piano sitting on a field of gold, far displaced from the silhouette of a city skyline positioned underneath a colorful sky. The image implies that music can enable this transformation. David Benoit's *Urban Daydreams* takes the viewer out of a skyscraper window and into a vast desert landscape with a portal that appears to lead into space. And, on Spyro Gyra's album *In Modern Times*, a farming community continues to glow even though the background is filled with the sprawl of a master-planned subdivision.

### *On Recreation*

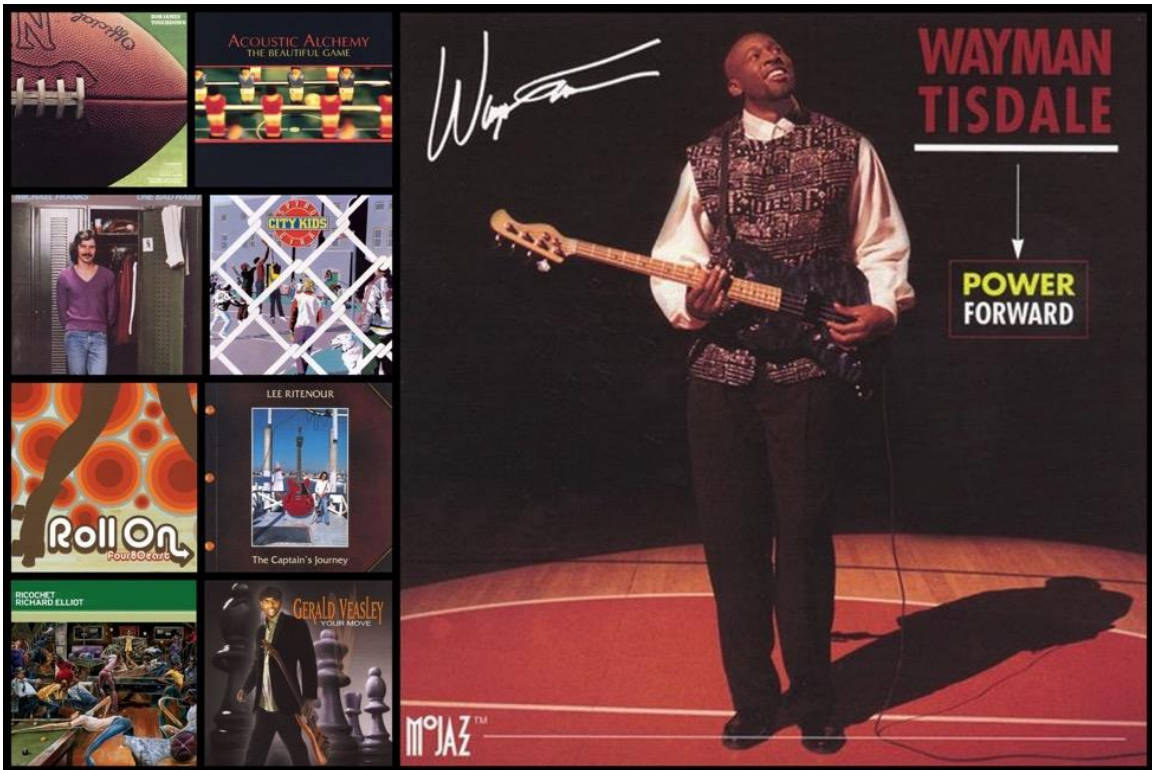
Smooth jazz album covers frequently depict musicians and listeners alike enjoying themselves in a variety of social situations and recreational opportunities. Figure 4.19 displays some examples of the 26 dance-inspired album covers found in the smooth jazz canon, including BWB's *Groovin'* and Chris Standring's *Don't Talk, Dance!*



**Figure 4.19:** Smooth jazz album covers featuring dancing.

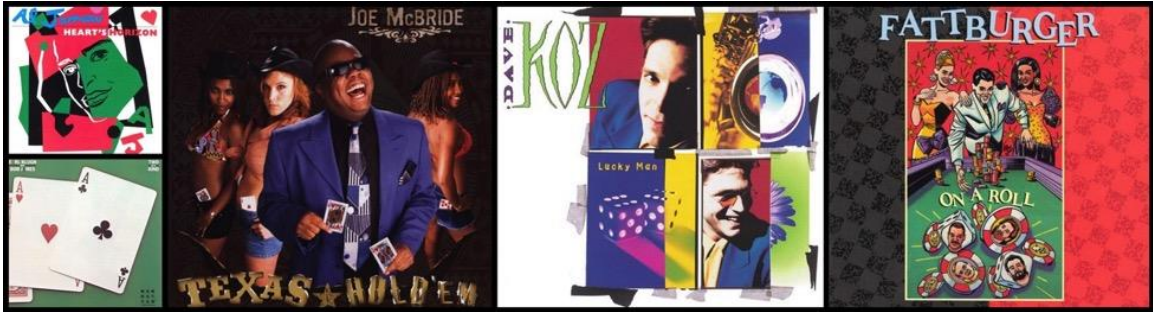
Many smooth jazz coverscapes are devoted to leisure scenes, and Figure 4.20 includes examples of album covers that reflect sports and games. Before the late Wayman Tisdale performed bouncy grooves on his bass, as can be seen on *Power Forward*, he exhibited a bounce in his step as a professional basketball player in the NBA. Another professional athlete, former New York Yankees centerfielder Bernie Williams, has enjoyed a post-sports career in smooth jazz. Several sports are referenced, including street basketball on Spyro Gyra's *City Kids*, football on Bob James' *Touchdown*, and a foosball image is on the front of Acoustic Alchemy's *The Beautiful Game*. The back of that CD has the English band on the field at the original Wembley Stadium, seemingly in awe of the sacred ground that long served as the home stadium of the English national soccer team. Other examples in this category include Lee Ritenour fishing on the cover of *The Captain's Journey*, Michael Franks standing in a baseball locker room, and rollerskating giving a retro feel on Four80East's *Roll On*. Richard Elliot's *Ricochet* and Gerald Veasley's *Your Move* serve as examples of games, including pool and chess, respectively.





**Figure 4.20:** Smooth jazz album covers featuring sports and games.

Considering the affluence of the smooth jazz audience, it is not surprising that a high-stakes form of gaming—gambling—has been featured in album titles and imagery (Figure 4.21). Dave Koz is smiling about rolling double sixes on *Lucky Man*, while the faces of Fattburger’s band members appear on the casino chips being tossed into play on the cover of *On A Roll*. Playing cards are often used in cover art, including a pair of aces on Bob James and Earl Klugh’s *Two of A Kind* and a Jack of Hearts on Al Jarreau’s *Heart’s Horizon*. Joe McBride, leader of the Dallas-based Texas Rhythm Club, can be seen smiling on the cover of *Texas Hold ‘Em* showing the Jack and King of Hearts, while three young Stetson-wearing women each have a card peeking out of their jean shorts, revealing that McBride has been dealt a royal flush, the highest-ranking poker hand.



**Figure 4.21:** Smooth jazz album covers featuring gambling and gaming.

Smooth jazz has always been geared toward adult audiences, and, thus, it follows that another conspicuous theme in this style's album covers involves the age-restricted activities of smoking and alcoholic consumption (Figure 4.22). Two album covers, Brian Hughes' *Shakin' Not Stirred* and Bob James and Earl Klugh's collaboration *One On One*, are designed to look like matchbooks. Sixteen different albums contain alcoholic consumption, and when it comes to beverages of choice, they include champagne, wine, and martinis, as evidenced on Grover Washington's *Winelight*, Shilts' *All Grown Up*, and Bobby Caldwell's *Songmaster*. Three saxophonists (Kim Waters, Steve Cole, and Jeff Kashiwa) have teamed up to form an act called The Sax Pack, which was inspired by the 1960s Rat Pack, a talented group of performers who had a reputation for heavy drinking.





Figure 4.22: Smooth jazz album covers promoting social drinking and smoking.

## Attire

When it comes to appearance, the musicians gracing the covers of smooth jazz albums have a dichotomy of dress. In Figure 4.23, the musicians can be seen in a variety of formalwear, including men sporting tuxedos, two- and three-piece suits, jackets, ties, and women wearing dresses. London-born Oli Sharp leaves no doubt about his place of origin on *Razor Sharp Brit*, on which he wears a necktie with a Union Jack flag print, while Ramsey Lewis also gets in on the pun, with *Three Piece Suite*.



Figure 4.23: Smooth jazz attire: All dressed up.

At the same time, smooth jazz has never tried to be inaccessible, so there is also a casual side to be seen. In Figure 4.24, Peter White, Euge Groove, Lee Ritenour, and



Eric Marienthal are all seen wearing jeans, but many of these albums also feature musicians with bare feet. Alex Bugnon is reclined in a chair with his feet on top of the keyboard on *Southern Living* and Rick Braun seems to be channeling *Abbey Road* Paul McCartney by not wearing any footwear on the pavement of *Beat Street*.

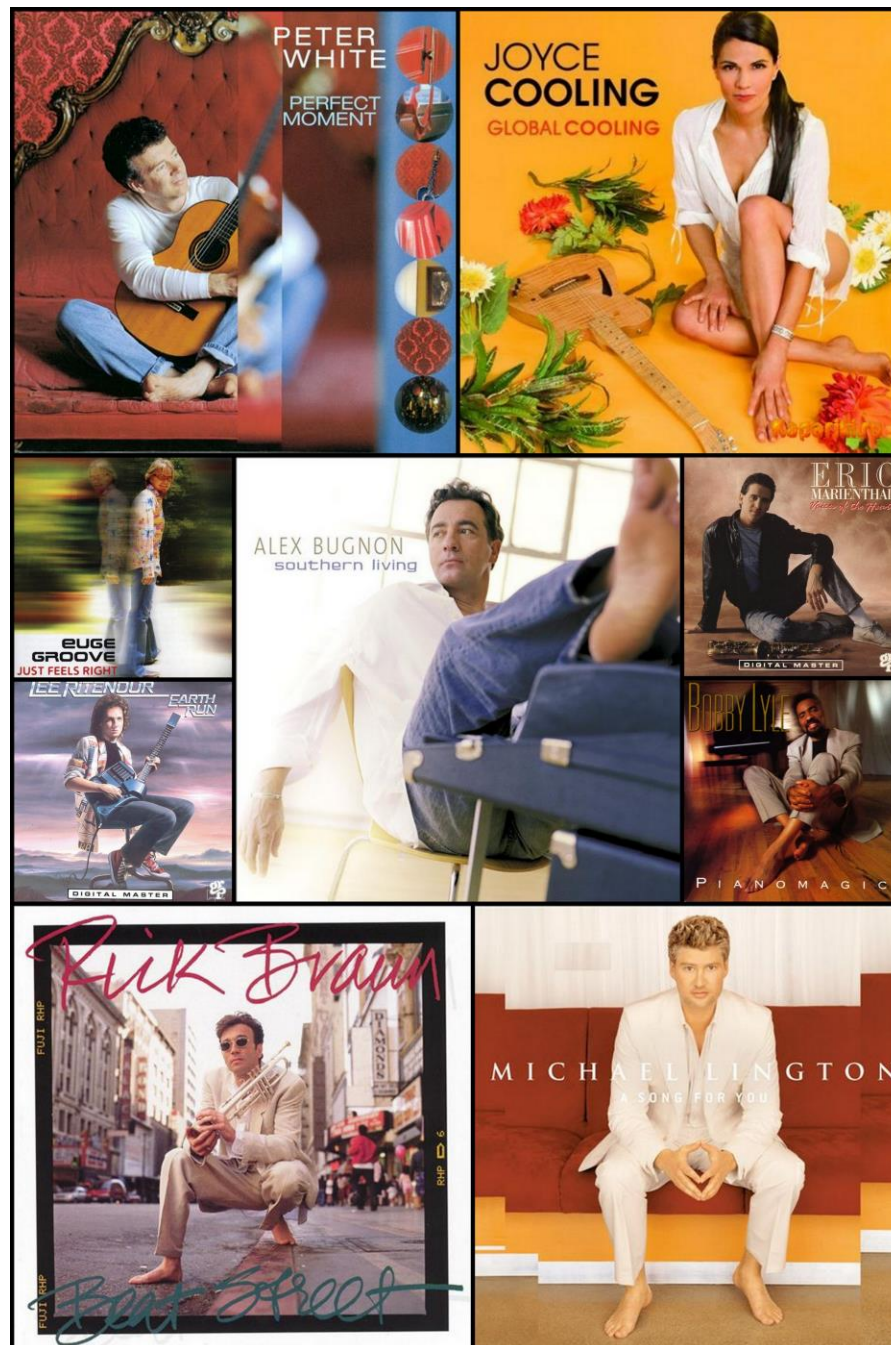


Figure 4.24: Smooth jazz attire: Casual dress and barefoot artists.

The most ubiquitous article of clothing throughout smooth jazz album covers was sunglasses (Figure 4.25), which appeared in a total of 49 covers (more than 3% of all albums). Regardless of the musicians' attire being formal or casual, or whether the pictures were taken outdoors vs. indoors or during the day vs. at night, these artists believe there is a "cool" factor and shoot for the "specs" appeal.



**Figure 4.25:** Smooth jazz attire: Ubiquitous sunglasses.

## *Rendez-Views*

At the micro-scale of place, smooth jazz coverscapes portray a variety of places where the musicians appear to be waiting to meet the viewer and listener. Figure 4.26 features some of the album covers containing benches, several of which are situated in front of scenic vistas and seem to have plenty of room for one to take a moment and virtually take a seat beside the musicians.



**Figure 4.26:** Smooth jazz album covers set at benches.

While assigning keyword tags to album cover art, attention was paid to the types of buildings and rooms. There were covers portraying houses, apartments, city lofts, and hotels. Living rooms and bedrooms received the most treatments of rooms, although an album cover was found that depicted each of a kitchen, library, and garage. From an aesthetic perspective, one of the favorite techniques employed in smooth jazz album covers involved putting the focus of the musicians in front of doorways and windows (Figure 4.27). This makes the viewer curious about who or what is on the other side, and is analogous to piquing the listener's interest about how an album's music is going to sound.





**Figure 4.27:** Smooth jazz album covers set in front of doors and windows.

Another aesthetic technique employed by graphic artists for smooth jazz coverscapes involved the use of silhouettes (Figure 4.28). The abstraction of a subject to just an outline adds an air of mystery to the scene. Sometimes, the silhouette remains surprisingly recognizable, such as in the cases of Brian Culbertson's hairstyle and Boney James' signature hat. The silhouettes also tend to feature the curves of women, almost in the style of the opening title sequences of James Bond films.



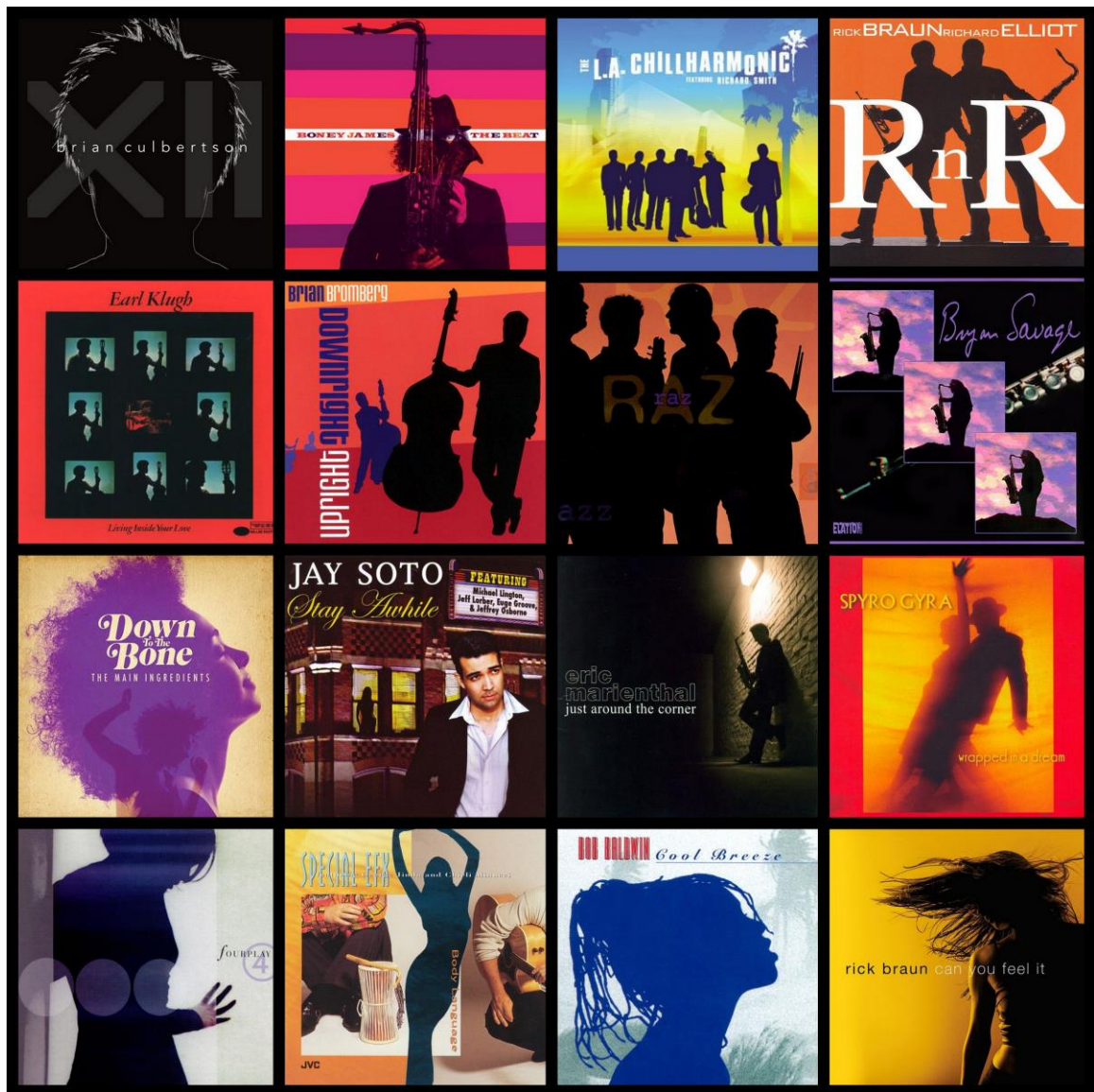


Figure 4.28: Silhouettes on smooth jazz album art.

Women tend to be depicted as objects of affection on smooth jazz album covers, as can be seen in Figure 4.29. Female torsos abound in the middle row of the collage, such as on Boney James' *Body Language* and Spyro Gyra's *Good To Go Go*. Sometimes the music and the women literally become one. Music notation is projected onto a

woman's back on Gerald Albright's *Giving Myself to You*, while lines representing F-holes are drawn onto a woman's lower back to make her resemble a double bass on Brian Bromberg's *You Know That Feeling*. Sometimes the women even gets played, such as how Bobby Lyle feels up a woman wearing a keyboard dress on the cover of *The Power of Touch*.



Figure 4.29: Role of women in smooth jazz album art.

A good deal of smooth jazz is devoted to late-night mood music, and sensuality and eroticism easily find their way into cover art. In the upper-right corner, a woman is not smoking a cigarette, but rather having her embouchure objectified as she holds a sax mouthpiece on Tom Scott's *Reed My Lips*. Fattburger's album *All Natural Ingredients* features a woman laid out in a pink swimsuit holding up a hamburger, which seems like something out of a rejected Carl's Jr. advertisement. As if Fourplay's band name were not suggestive enough, a woman is seen bending over on an album titled *Yes, Please!*

While the overwhelming majority of album covers are situated in public space, there are still a noteworthy proportion of albums that are set in private space, often evoking intimacy and romance between partners, as exemplified in Chieli Minucci's *Sweet On You* and Eric Marienthal's *Sweet Talk*. There are also plenty of scenes filled with sexual tension, such as Ronny Jordan's *After 8*, Walter Beasley's *For Your Pleasure*, and Jeff Golub's *Temptation*.

#### *Medley of Miscellany*

Oli Silk's album *All We Need* (Figure 4.30) may be the most thought-provoking artwork out of all album covers analyzed in this study. It makes a powerful statement about seeking harmony. Not only does the embrace of black and white anthropomorphic piano keys send a stirring message about seeking harmony regardless of any of our cultural backgrounds, but one should appreciate this image from a musical

perspective as well, as "consonance" has been achieved between pitches participating in a major-seventh (M7) interval (B-flat and A).



**Figure 4.30:** Oli Silk's album *All We Need*.

Many musicians have released albums of live recordings, and several reference the venues where the performances occurred (Figure 4.31). Dave Koz recorded an album *Live At the Blue Note Tokyo*, a jazz club in Japan that ranked 5th overall in total smooth jazz performances made between 1999 and 2013, according to the Pollstar concert database. Dutch saxophonist Candy Dulfer recorded *Live In Amsterdam* in her native country, Gerald Albright's *Live At Birdland West* was recorded at a former Long Beach jazz club, and Chuck Mangione's flugelhorn filled the air at the massive Hollywood Bowl. Chris Botti has released multiple live albums over the years, including *Chris Botti in Boston* (2009), but the same picture of Boston's Symphony Hall is also found on the album cover of *Chris Botti in Australia* (2010).

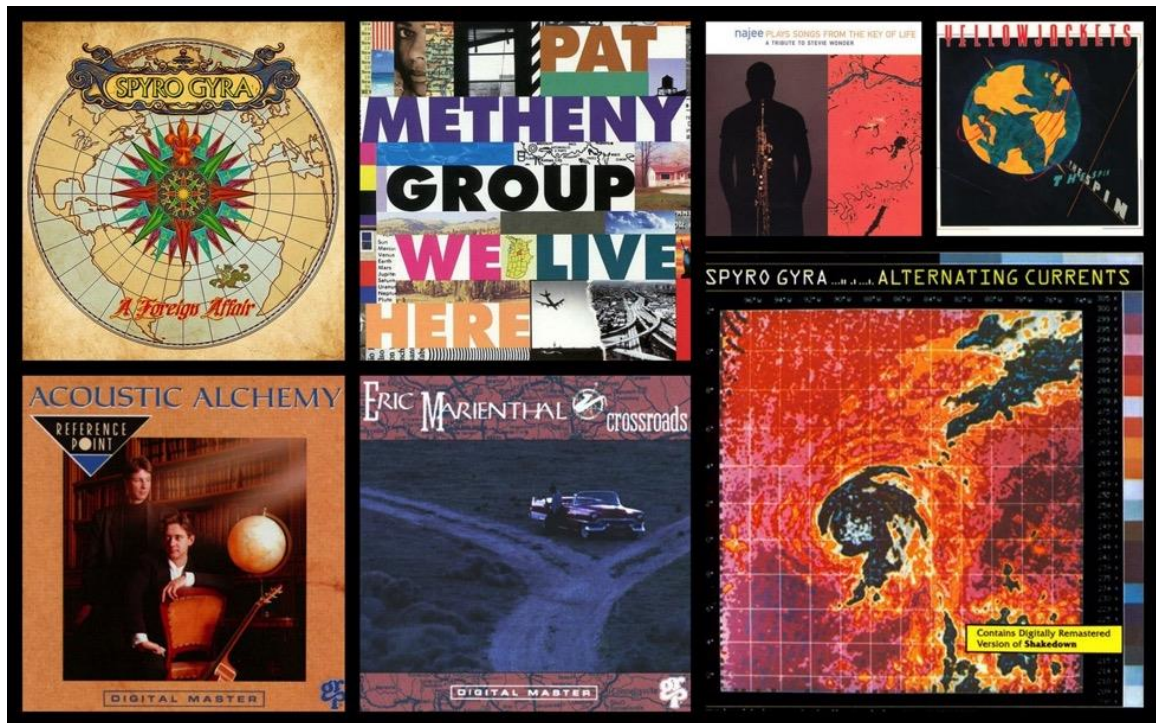




**Figure 4.31:** Smooth jazz album covers: Live in concert.

Some smooth jazz coverscapes even feature examples of cartography. In Figure 4.32, Acoustic Alchemy's guitarists pose next to a globe in a library on *Reference Point*. Spyro Gyra's *A Foreign Affair* and The Yellowjackets' *The Spin* albums feature globes that both are positioned so that they show the Americas. Spyro Gyra's *Alternating Currents* shows radar imagery of a hurricane, recalling the theme of weatherscapes. Najee's

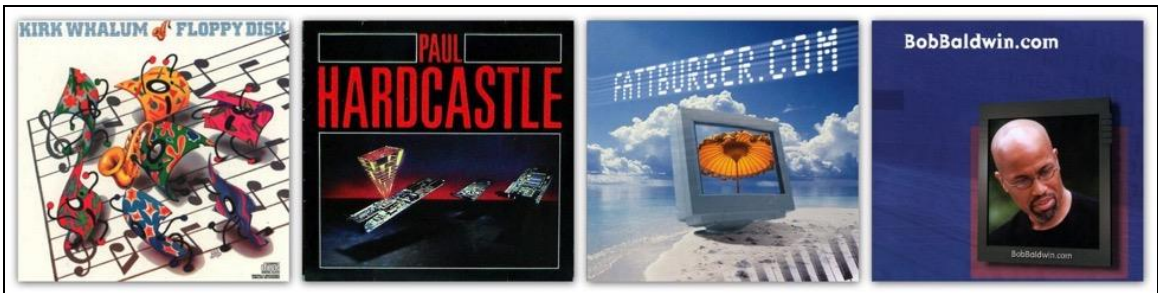
*Songs From the Key of Life* has half the cover devoted to a false-color image of a river. Eric Marienthal's *Crossroads* features portions of a highway map from rural southwestern Pennsylvania, which is an interesting choice considering that Marienthal is a Californian. Pat Metheny's *We Live Here* has map snippets of his native state of Missouri.



**Figure 4.32:** Smooth jazz album covers featuring globes, maps, and cartography.

Technology (Figure 4.33) has played a pivotal role in the music of smooth jazz, including the use of synthesizers and electronic wind instruments (EWI) to expand the sound palette. Smooth jazz also grew up alongside the evolution of personal computing. Back in 1985, Kirk Whalum's *Floppy Disk* album found anthropomorphic diskettes dancing on a page of sheet music, while large sticks of RAM memory floated

on the cover of Paul Hardcastle's self-titled release. Fast-forward to 2000, and smooth jazz album titles began doubling as Web sites, such as *BobBaldwin.com* and *Fattburger.com*, with Baldwin sticking his head out of a monitor, while Fattburger's CRT screen has virtually transported the listener to a waterscape comprised of a sandy beach, blue sky, and floating cotton clouds.



**Figure 4.33:** Tech-savvy smooth jazz coverscapes.

#### *Jewel Case Study: The Rippingtons*

Over the past three decades, the smooth jazz group that has been the most prolific has been The Rippingtons, a revolving group of musicians that was originally founded in Los Angeles by guitarist Russ Freeman in 1986. The current line up features Freeman on guitar, Bill Heller on keyboards, Rico Belled on bass, Dave Karasony as drummer, and Jeff Kashiwa on saxophone. Past members of this supergroup have included some of the biggest names in smooth jazz, including David Benoit, Kenny G, Dave Koz, Eric Marienthal, Paul Taylor, and Kirk Whalum. Over the course of 28 years and 20 albums, the only two constants in the band have been its leader (Freeman) and the Jazz Cat, the group's mascot and product of graphic artist Bill Mayer, who has designed all of the cover art for the band's complete discography, which can be seen in Figure 4.34.





Figure 4.34: Visual discography of The Rippingtons.



The sunglass-wearing cat with a Cheshire-like grin has traveled the world in hedonistic fashion. On *Cote D’Azur*, the Jazz Cat is enjoying the camaraderie of two feline companions as they share some wine on a yacht during a Mediterranean sunset. On *Weekend In Monaco*, the Jazz Cat can be seen cruising around coastal curves, perhaps with aspirations of one day entering the Monaco Grand Prix. He has also been spotted behind the wheel, driving across a futuristic cityscape on *Brave New World*. The Jazz Cat’s travels have also taken him to the lower latitudes, as he can be seen on the cover of *Life In the Tropics* in front of two women wearing bikinis on a beach with palm trees, and about to take his guitar into an all-inclusive Antiguan resort on *Welcome to the St. James Club*. The Jazz Cat even has the red carpet rolled out for him on *Live in L.A.*

Several of The Rippingtons’ album covers depict games and sports. On *Wild Card*, the Jazz Cat is dressed as the Joker on a playing card that features all four suits. The Jazz Cat is also quite the downhill skier, having received much practice on *Curves Ahead* and again on *Black Diamond*. While the latter’s album cover depicts the Jazz Cat as a jewel thief, *Black Diamond* refers to a difficulty rating used in Alpine skiing, and this concept album contains songs bearing titles such as “Deep Powder,” “North Peak,” and some ski resorts including “Big Sky” and “Angelfire.” In the summer, the Jazz Cat prefers to either practice his golf game or go surfing. *Let It Ripp!* shows the Jazz Cat driving a golf ball on a clear day. As the album contains tracks titled “Mr. 3” (likely a golf score) and “17 Mile Drive,” one might wonder if the Jazz Cat is playing Pebble Beach Golf Links, one of the most expensive greens in the world. On the cover of *Tourist In Paradise*, the Jazz Cat skillfully rides a wave using a guitar as a makeshift surfboard.

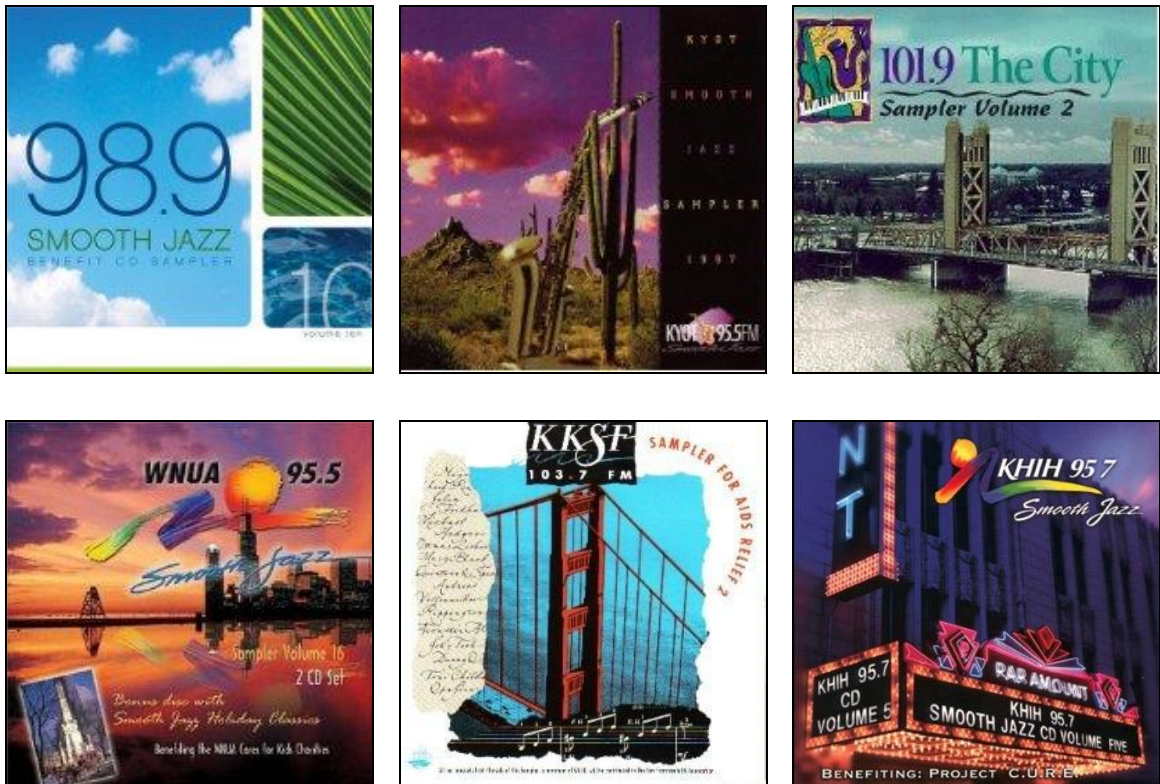
*Topaz*, a concept album about the American Southwest, features songs titled “Spirits of the Canyon,” “Stories of the Painted Desert,” and “Taos.” The cover art finds the Jazz Cat’s face incorporated into a nighttime canyon scene, while a band of Kokopelli silhouettes play flutes. On *Fountain of Youth*, the Jazz Cat is dressed in the style of Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon and is positioned in front of a waterfall.

The cover of *Live Across America* features a 3D map of the United States from the perspective of Florida, with landmarks and claims to fame covering the surface, including the Golden Gate Bridge, Statue of Liberty, White House, Liberty Bell, Gateway Arch, Cape Canaveral, Georgia peaches, Maine lobsters, Wisconsin cheese, Texas oil and longhorn cattle. The Jazz Cat leaps across the Gulf of Mexico with a guitar strapped around his back while carrying an American flag. On *Built To Last*, the twentieth album released by the band, the Jazz Cat has achieved monumental longevity and can be seen taking the place of Teddy Roosevelt on a rendering of Mount Rushmore. On *Sahara*, the Jazz Cat had previously been portrayed as the Sphinx.

### *Various Artists*

Up until this point, the discussion has been centered on the album covers of full-length releases from smooth jazz soloists and bands, with the exception of the Weather Channel’s compilations. Over the past 25 years, approximately one hundred smooth jazz compilation CDs have been released, attempting to increase exposure to this music. Connell and Gibson (2008) discussed how airlines released records of Hawaiian music in an effort to promote ridership on their new trans-oceanic routes. Likewise, in hopes of

reaching new listeners, numerous smooth jazz radio stations produced volume-upon-volume of samplers (Figure 4.35) of the music from their playlists. These CDs were sometimes mailed out to all residents living in a radio market, sometimes sold at local music stores, and/or offered to donors of various charitable campaigns.

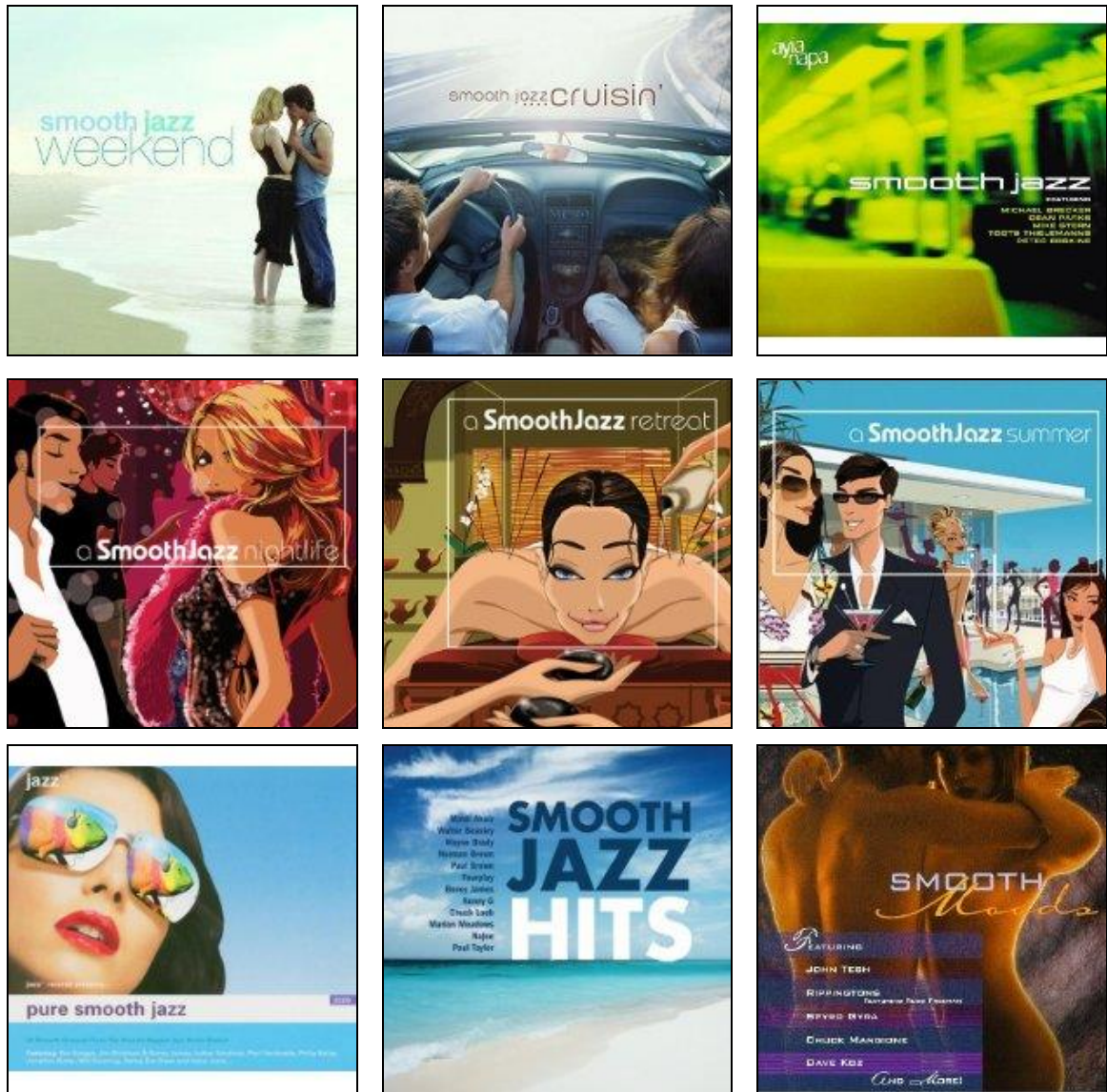


**Figure 4.35:** Examples of smooth jazz radio station sampler album covers.

Many of the themes that have already been discussed appear in these coverscapes, arguably in even more stereotypical form. Seattle's KWJZ 98.9 FM sampler features the blue sky with cumulus clouds. A saxophone leans up against a saguaro cactus in a desert landscape in twilight for Phoenix's KYOT 95.5 FM sampler. Chicago's WNUA 95.5 FM sampler features a sunset scene for Lake Michigan with the Chicago

skyline in the background. Additional waterscapes can be found in the compilations for San Francisco's KKSF 103.7 FM and Sacramento's KKSJ 101.9 FM, which include the Golden Gate Bridge and Tower Bridge, respectively. Denver's Paramount Theatre, a live music venue that has hosted smooth jazz concerts in the past, is found on the cover of KHIH 95.7 FM's sampler.

Additional examples of smooth jazz compilation CDs (Figure 4.36) reflect even more pronounced stereotypes found within the genre's coverscapes. Here, again, are examples of transportation, by rail or by convertible, people wearing sunglasses, affluence, social drinking, couples sharing intimacy, and waterscapes comprised of beaches and pools. Caricatures abound, promoting leisure and escape. The titles of these albums pair "smooth jazz" with words including *weekend*, *nightlife*, *retreat*, *summer*, *cruisin'* and *moods*. A great deal of attention is placed into making things look "smooth," down to the rounded sans serif fonts containing the album titles.



**Figure 4.36:** Examples of smooth jazz various artist compilation album covers.

## Other Visual Media

### Print Advertising

Album covers are not the only visual means by which place is packaged with the music. *Smooth Jazz News* is a bi-monthly contemporary jazz lifestyle magazine that has been published since 1999. Each issue features reviews of newly released albums,

articles about recent concerts and festivals, a calendar of upcoming jazz events, and articles on art and travel. For several years, the slogan on the magazine's cover read "Jazz Buzz and the Succulent Life." In the May 2008 issue, a page soliciting reservation of advertisement space claimed that characteristics of *Smooth Jazz News* readers were "Affluent 30- to 65-year-old professionals; Traveling to jazz festivals and concerts; Staying in hotels and resorts; Spending money on physical improvement; Indulging in spa treatments; Music-buying jazz fans; and Enjoying fine wine and dining" (67). Thumbing through that same issue, advertisements could be found for jazz concert series at two Temecula, California wineries (Wilson Creek and Thornton), dozens of Sunday jazz brunches held across the country, announcements for two smooth jazz-themed cruises departing from Florida, advertisements for hotel and concert packages at two southern California Hyatt hotels, and plenty of pictures and stories detailing recent waterfront festivals held at Big Bear Lake (CA), Newport Beach (CA), Avalon (CA), Clearwater (FL), Panama City Beach (FL), Monroe (MI), and in the Bahamas.

About 26 miles off the coast of Los Angeles, Santa Catalina Island's town of Avalon has been the host of producer Art Good's Catalina Island JazzTrax Festival for 27 years. The long-running festival is held over multiple weekends every October at the Avalon Casino Ballroom, pictured in the festival posters in Figure 4.37. Even in these posters, smooth waterscapes and gorgeous skies abound, and the wine continues to be poured, in these cases into glasses patterned after jazz instruments.



**Figure 4.37:** Examples of Catalina Island JazzTrax festival posters.

### *Music Videos*

Unlike pop, rock, and country genres, smooth jazz musicians do not produce a lot of music videos, but the fewer than 30 videos that have been made over the years fall right in line in supporting many of the themes that have been discussed in this paper. Thumbnail images and hyperlinks to the music videos discussed in this section are included at the conclusion of this paper.

The music video for Nils Jiptner’s “Pacific Coast Highway” begins with footage of dolphins and waves before showing the guitarist driving a Mercedes convertible along the route (California Highway 1), on his way to a mansion on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Upon arrival, Nils dips his feet in a large swimming pool, enjoys a glass of red wine, and takes in the scenery until his band mates join him to play the rest of the song.



Just to the north, the video for “Cool of the Night” by guitarist Joyce Cooling is set in her hometown of San Francisco. The video begins with footage of a moon rising behind the Bay Bridge. A taxi is seen driving near Powell Street, eventually stopping to let Cooling get out and walk for a while through Chinatown and some tourist areas, where the camera zooms in at one point on a display of miniature California vanity license plates, one of which has the name “Joyce.” The video begins to alternate between footage of Cooling performing a gig and scenes of Cooling enjoying the nightlife. The latter encounters and enjoys the music of a sax player playing outside of City Light Books on Columbus Avenue. Cooling hops around different clubs and hangouts, including Jeanty at Jack’s, Bimbo’s 365, and Jazz at Pearl’s, a once-popular jazz club that has since closed. Cooling is seen enjoying a drink and flirting with a man, but after that does not pan out, she takes the taxi home, and the video ends with panoramic views of downtown San Francisco and the Bay, most likely from the vantage point of Twin Peaks.

Saxophonist Mindi Abair can be seen enjoying the nightlife of Los Angeles in the video for “Down for the Count.” Abair plays her sax in several spots along West Hollywood’s Sunset Boulevard, including at the corner of Clark Street in front of live music venue Whisky A Go Go and at a bus stop near Hammond Street, across from another popular music venue, The Roxy. Later in the video, Abair is performing her own concert at the Canyon Club in Agoura Hills.

Chris Standring also liked the idea of setting his video for “Oliver’s Twist” in Los Angeles, but the guitarist wanted to get above the city. While a sunglasses-wearing



Standring plays his song on a downtown rooftop, he is joined by dozens of men, women, and children, of all ages and in a variety of dress who come upstairs to dance along. Toward the end of the video, it is apparent that this sunset party is happening at Helipad 15 at the top of the WaterMarke Tower at West 9th Street and South Flower Street.

Several smooth jazz music videos have also been filmed in California outside of urban areas. Keiko Matsui's plays a white piano in the middle of a desert filled with Joshua Trees in the video for "The Road..." Brian Culbertson's video for "Horizon" features the keyboardist playing his Roland at Napa Valley's Jamieson Ranch Vineyards. The video also features footage of trumpet soloist Michael "Patches" Stewart performing on The Smooth Cruise, and scenes of a sunset at sea and the wake from the cruise ship are interwoven throughout the video.

Saxophonist Boney James and trumpeter Rick Braun collaborated on a smooth jazz version of "Grazing In the Grass." The two musicians start playing on a street corner outside a market in an impoverished neighborhood of New York City. A young boy skips school, goes for a taxi ride, and gets an education on various forms of dance and jazz as he makes his way around town before coming across the two musicians who have drawn quite a crowd. When the boy returns home, his mother asks him about his day at school, to which he replies, "It was good."

The most commercially successful smooth jazz artist has been Kenny G, who achieved success in the mainstream beginning in the late 1980s. Before he starred as "Uncle Kenny" (a parody of himself) in Katy Perry's "Last Friday Night," Kenneth Gorelick had several music videos in the 1980s and 1990s. In the video for "The Moment," the

Seattle native can be seen flying his own De Havilland Beaver seaplane (Strauss 1997) and playing his sax at the Pike Place Fish Market, beside the Puget Sound at sunset, and with the city lights of downtown Seattle as a backdrop. In the video for “Silhouette,” Kenny G takes a stroll down a wet street in the dark, presumably following a sold-out performance he had just given at the Wiltern Theater on Wilshire in Los Angeles, based on the marquee shown at the beginning of the video. In the video for his most famous song, “Songbird,” Kenny G can be seen playing his saxophone on a park bench, on a rooftop, and in Santa Monica at the yacht harbor and underneath the clock tower.

Finally, returning to The Rippingtons, the campy video for “Tourist In Paradise” opens with shimmery water and transitions to the approach of a yacht, upon which bandleader Russ Freeman is seen relaxing under the sun. An attractive woman on the yacht removes her cover up, Freeman takes his sunglasses off, and they begin to dance and embrace. The scene shifts to the beach, where the full band is playing their song as waves crash onto the rocky shoreline. The Jazz Cat is also animated into the video, and he approves of the woman in the bikini, who is now holding a fishing pole, until he gets scared of the dog by her side, leading him to jump into the ocean. After alternating scenes of beach jamming, the yacht, and the woman, the Jazz Cat returns to view, riding a large wave on a guitar, in similar fashion to the depiction on the album cover of the same name.

These days, there is a good chance that if someone is wanting to listen to a song of any genre, it can be found on video-sharing Web sites. It has become commonplace for music fans to create and post “lyric videos,” where the audio is supplemented with

video that serves to provide the song's words at the time they are sung. In the case of smooth jazz, however, which is mainly instrumental, it is interesting how fans of this music have decided to portray the audio along with their own visual representations.

A survey of YouTube revealed that numerous users have uploaded smooth jazz songs and have provided visual content to accompany the music. User SOUNDS08 illustrated Peter White's "Autumn Day" with a series of fall foliage pictures, while user OCEANSANDCLOUDS posted pictures of mountain fog as the visual program to complement Craig Chaquico's "Mountain in the Mist." User THE-SMOOTHJAZZ-LOFTII merged time-lapse photography of New York City with Paul Brown's track "The City," as did user LAVENDER HILL PENTHOUSE SUITE with Grover Washington and Peter White's song "Midnight In Manhattan." User SMOOTHJAZZ drew from Getty Images' video stock to show a woman getting a seaside massage for Euge Groove's "Sunday Morning." Shahin and Sepehr's symbolic "East West Highway" was incorporated into a tourist's actual drive made through Monument Valley (user THESBLEUE B.). Some users have been prolific at producing these videos, such as GQLICIOUS, who has posted 26 pictorial videos for songs of The Rippingtons and another 22 for Paul Hardcastle and the Jazzmasters. In other cases, particular songs, such as Chris Botti's "Venice," have yielded multiple videos with different perspectives and imagery to come together with the music. User STYLEMUSICART set Botti's song to various Italian paintings, while user ASEMANEABI77 worked with a combination of photography and illustration but focused mostly on the canal scenes. What is interesting here is that smooth jazz musicians and their audiences are successfully negotiating senses of place with each other.

## Conclusion

As has been shown, the scapes of smooth jazz are filled with plenty of specific places (i.e., Manhattan, Los Angeles, etc.) as well as general types of places found at various scales, such as waterscapes, city streets, park benches, and bedrooms. In some cases, there are personal ties between performers and place, such as Hiroshima/Little Tokyo, Jeff Lorber/Philadelphia, and Eric Essex/Birmingham, whereas in other cases the artwork was chosen to represent the music on the album and/or the genre.

Stereotypes for “smoothness” abound through the repetitive visual representations of water, sand, breezes, clear skies, soft cumulus clouds, driving on an open road, sans serif fonts, and even the curves of the female body.

In smooth jazz scapes, there exists much ambivalence toward cities. On one hand, they are centers of activity, offering much nightlife and opportunity. However, the imagery also suggests that it is more appealing to escape the city, such as traveling outward by train, ascending to a rooftop or overlook, viewing the city lights from a distance, and having a city skyline in the background rather than being immersed in an urban jungle.

Smooth jazz radio station WSBZ “Seabreeze” 106.3 FM of Destin / Fort Walton Beach, Florida promotes that “smooth jazz is a lifestyle that appeals to a sophisticated audience that enjoys the finer things in life” (Seabreeze FM 2014). The visual branding found within the smooth jazz coverscapes reflects recreation, leisure, dancing, retreats, travel, mobility, fancy attire, social drinking, and the good life, in general.

In addition to being lifestyle music, smooth jazz is mood music, and the implication from the scapes is that this music can set the tone for late-night intimacy as well as virtually transport the listener to exotic places and utopias featuring great vistas, perfect weather, and beautiful skies.

The visual imagery associated with this genre of music turned out to be consistent, whether studying album covers, periodicals, or music videos. Expanding the search to include other media, such as artist websites and other promotional materials, would likely return more of the same. It was fascinating to see how the visual illustrations seen in the fan-made music videos were in such close agreement with the visual representations found in the industry-produced album covers and official music videos.

Perhaps Libeks and Turnbull could predict a smooth jazz album by its cover, by having their algorithm look for tan sand, blue water, yellow sun, colorful skies, and turning on facial recognition to look for all of those pairs of sunglasses being worn by the musicians.

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*Official Smooth Jazz Music Videos*



[Down for the Count](#)

Mindi Abair (2010)



[Cool of the Night](#)

Joyce Cooling (2006)



[Horizon](#)

Brian Culbertson (2014)



[Grazing in the Grass](#)

B. James / R. Braun (2000)



[Songbird](#)

Kenny G (1986)



[Silhouette](#)

Kenny G (1988)



[The Moment](#)

Kenny G (1996)



[San Say](#)

Hiroshima (1983)



[The Road...](#)

Keiko Matsui (2011)



[Pacific Coast Highway](#)

Nils (2005)



[Tourist in Paradise](#)

The Rippingtons (1989)



[Oliver's Twist](#)

Chris Standring (2012)

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

Although contemporary/smooth jazz has been commercially successful for nearly three decades, it has received little overall scholarly attention. In an attempt to fill this void, this dissertation has considered this music from three different geographic perspectives, looking at its listenership and consumption, considering how sense of place is expressed musically, and exploring how place is visually packaged along with the music in album covers and music videos.

### **Chapter II Retrospect**

This chapter focused on investigating the geography of smooth jazz listenership. Profiling the audience for this music was accomplished through examining data relating to radio listenership and concert attendance.

First, approaching smooth jazz as a radio format, twenty-five years of radio broadcasting data pertaining to market penetration and listener shares were compiled and analyzed to reveal the geography of the audience regularly tuning in to smooth jazz. The smooth jazz radio format was most successful throughout California, Florida, and



the Mid-Atlantic region. These areas enjoyed the broadest radio market penetration, the greatest longevity and continuity of stations playing smooth jazz, and the highest relative listener shares attained by the format. In the process of studying smooth jazz broadcasting, the profile of the audience was depicted as affluent, educated, older, gender neutral, and ethnically diverse. Despite the recent disappearance of smooth jazz from terrestrial radio, this music continues to thrive through satellite radio and online programming, which have actually lifted the geographic constraint of traditional terrestrial radio listening sheds, now allowing smooth jazz to have a greater geographic penetration.

The second means of understanding the geography of smooth jazz listenership involved compiling data on concerts performed by smooth jazz musicians. A total of 19,652 performances made by 204 smooth jazz acts at 3,665 venues were drawn from PollstarPro's concert database, representing a fifteen-year period spanning 1999-2014. More than 84% of smooth jazz concerts were performed within the United States, with Japan, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, and Canada representing the only countries to receive at least one percent of the performances. Location quotients for smooth jazz concerts performed by state during this time revealed that western states (California, Nevada, and Washington), Florida, and a cluster of Mid-Atlantic states spanning from Virginia through Connecticut possessed the highest rates of smooth jazz concertizing. In addition to considering the locations of performances, the venues themselves were also of interest from the perspective of performance space as place. Some of the prominent sites for smooth jazz concerts have been supper clubs, small performing arts centers,

casinos, high-end hotel amphitheaters, outdoor waterfront festivals, wineries, and even cruise ships.

### **Chapter III Retrospect**

The objective of this chapter was to consider how landscapes have served as an inspiration to smooth jazz artists, and how these musicians have portrayed aspects of place through a variety of musical elements. Whereas much research in the sub-field of music geography has been focused on lyrical analysis, this chapter demonstrated that a mainly instrumental style of music, such as smooth jazz, has a lot of fodder for scholars interested in studying its sense of place through other musical parameters, including but not limited to melody, harmony, tempo, rhythm, timbre, dynamics, instrumentation, texture, and aesthetics. The musical examples in this chapter revealed that waterscapes, weather, time, streets, cities, and travels to and from home all served as inspiration behind the smooth jazz repertoire. Several examples were discussed to show how different musicians interpreted and have been inspired by the same landscape, such as in the cases of California's Catalina Island and Pacific Coast Highway.

When smooth jazz musicians evoke place, about half of the compositions feature places within the United States, with the other half of the attention given to other regions, most notably the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Mediterranean. These artists serve as musical tour guides, taking armchair listeners of this music to exotic places. Many compositions have incorporated aspects of traditional music with varying degrees of authenticity, straddling the line between cultural appropriation and

appreciation. Given that, with very few exceptions, the smooth jazz radio format was exclusively an American phenomenon, and that more than 84% of all smooth jazz concerts performed within the past 15 years took place in the United States, it is of interest to observe the attention that the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe have received when it comes to musical treatment in smooth jazz songs. For example, Paris and Rio de Janeiro are referenced in more smooth jazz song titles than every city except New York, but since 1999, only 11 smooth jazz artists performed in Paris, while George Benson was the only artist to perform in Rio de Janeiro. Thus, the music likely reflects a desire by these musicians and their audiences to travel to these faraway places, but for most, this travel must be made virtually. Many smooth jazz musicians have incorporated bossa nova and samba rhythms to evoke Brazil, while the inclusion of an accordion often provides a stereotypical illustration of Paris.

#### **Chapter IV Retrospect**

While the previous chapter focused on examining an *aural* sense of place in smooth jazz, the objective of this chapter was to investigate a corresponding *visual* sense of place surrounding how this music is marketed. The primary focus of this study was a content analysis of how place and lifestyle were depicted on more than 1,600 album covers, although attention was also devoted to print media, promotional materials, and music videos.

Several specific places and general types of places were found to be prominent in smooth jazz album coverscapes. Out of the specific places, Manhattan was the most popular, and was depicted most commonly through its skyline and bridges. Many of the same sources of inspiration that were depicted musically in Chapter 3, such as waterscapes, weatherscapes, transportation and travel, and cityscapes, were also prevalent themes on album covers. The coverscapes also reflected themes of technology, recreation and leisure, attire, the good life, and elitist landscapes.

A case study conducted in Chapter III featured a map of the many locations depicted in the song titles of Russ Freeman's band The Rippingtons, and included a discussion of several ways in which Freeman utilized various musical parameters to evoke place. This was revisited in Chapter IV with a complementary case study of the imagery found on the band's album covers and a music video. In both studies, The Rippingtons epitomize how smooth jazz musicians have made place "sound," as well as how they package place visually with their music.

A survey of official music videos released by smooth jazz artists provided additional support for the themes identified in the album covers. The settings of these music videos often featured coastal places, cruise ships, wineries, rooftops, or city nightlife. In the course of this research, it was discovered that there are many unofficial fan-made music videos posted on video sharing sites, and the pictures and video footage chosen by the listeners to accompany the music commonly supports both the song title and the visual themes identified in smooth jazz coverscapes. This

demonstrates that the musicians and their audiences are successfully negotiating place, through a complex ecosystem of song titles, sound, and visual imagery.

### **Significance and Future Research**

Standing on its own, this dissertation will hopefully be of interest to not only smooth jazz enthusiasts, but also those people in the industry who are involved with aspects of marketing, broadcasting, artist management, and concert booking. At the same time, while this dissertation was a case study on smooth jazz, it is hoped that the approaches taken here could be applied to better understanding other styles of music.

In order to understand the regional popularity of listenership and consumption, radio broadcasting and concert data were used for this study. However, it would be great to see research undertaken on the geography of other consumption proxies, including IP addresses for online music streaming and billing addresses used for online music (CD/digital download) purchases and ticket purchases for concerts and festivals.

It is hoped that this dissertation will encourage other music geographers to approach their study of music through additional parameters beyond song texts. There is much instrumental programmatic music out there in classical, jazz, new age, folk, and world music that could benefit from consideration given to how elements such as melody, tempo, rhythm, instrumentation, texture, dynamics, aesthetics, etc. are employed and utilized to evoke place.

This dissertation also sought to make a contribution to the emerging interdisciplinary field of coverscapes. Album covers, music videos, and other

commodities of musical promotion are virtually untapped resources as cultural artifacts and carry much meaning as they combine music, art, and advertising. The visual nature of these media is easily accessible and the messages found within can be quite powerful.

## VITA

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